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Foster parent retention: A study of the factors associated with foster parents who continue to provide foster care for longer than two years

Alberto Ramirez

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FOSTER PARENT RETENTION: A STUDY OF THE FACTORS

ASSOCIATED WITH FOSTER PARENTS WHO CONTINUE TO

PROVIDE FOSTER CARE FOR LONGER THAN TWO YEARS

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

———————————————

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

———————————————

by

Alberto Ramirez

June 2003

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Approved by:

_____   _____
Dr. Ray Liles, Faculty Supervisor   Date
Social Work

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Lorraine Castro, Executive Director
Bienvenidos Foster Family Agency

_____
Dr. Rosemary McCaslin,
M.S.W. Research Coordinator

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that may account for a foster family's capacity to remain fostering for more than two years. In order to do so, the researcher examined case files of foster families who had been fostering for more than two years and foster families who quit fostering prior to two years.

Results indicate that the foster mothers' age at the time of certification, the length of marriage of the foster parents, the number of biological children, and the length of time at their current residence at the time of certification, are all correlated with continuing to provide foster care services for longer than two years.

The results of this study may benefit foster care agencies and social workers in their quest for the recruitment of potential foster families who can provide for the needs of foster children on a long-term basis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my wife Victoria, my daughter Karina, and my son Erik. The completion of my graduate studies would not have been possible with out your support. I thank you for understanding how important this venture was for me and our family. I want you to know that I Love you all.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The recruitment and retention of foster families in both the public and private sectors has become a priority among child welfare professionals. It has been estimated that the number of foster homes in the United States dropped from 147,000 in 1985 to 100,000 in 1990 (Chamberlain, Moreland, & Reid, 1992). From the mid-1980's to 1990, caseloads for social workers increased from 290,000 to approximately 450,000 (Sanchirico, Lau, Jablonka, & Johnson, 1994). It was believed that the increase of foster care placements was directly related to an increase in poverty, homelessness, substance abuse problems, and child abuse reports (Harrison & Johnson, 1994). Although, the number of foster care placements has dropped over the past few years due the placement of children with relatives, the number of children involved with the foster care system continues to be high.

The problem that the current study addresses is foster parent retention: What are the characteristics of foster families that cease to foster and those who continue to foster? What factors account for a foster

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family's desire to remain fostering longer than two years? Why are some foster families able to foster for long periods of time whereas others are not?

Foster care agencies rely on foster families to care for and help to provide for the emotional, developmental, and psychological needs of children who are removed from their biological families due to abuse and neglect. The constant recruitment and retention of foster families has become essential in order to provide for the needs of foster children. Many private foster care agencies have to compete for a limited pool of available resources (families), and, as a result, have to look at ways to retain existing foster families (Sanchirico et al., 1998).

The recruitment and retention of foster families is a task that is both time consuming and costly. The loss of families limits the number of foster children that foster family agencies are able to service. Foster care agency administrators rely on the recruitment and retention of foster families to keep their private agencies open and competitive. Furthermore, intake workers from foster care agencies rely on available homes to place foster children. Pressure is therefore placed on recruitment staff to replace foster families that have decided to cease

fostering (Friedman, Lardieri, Murphy, Quick, & Wolfe, 1980; Rodwell & Biggerstaff, 1995).

In addition to creating a viable pool of foster families available for the placement of foster children, the retention of families is crucial for providing quality care and continuity for foster children (Campbell & Downs, 1987). Experienced foster families are able to meet the needs of foster children more readily and provide stable and consistent care. Therefore, it is important that foster family agencies retain their families, as they are experienced and understand both the foster care system and the needs of the foster children (Campbell & Downs, 1987).

The modern American system of foster care has a long history that dates back to colonial times (Hasci, 1995). Throughout American history, many children from poor families were reared in the homes of non related and related substitute caretakers. In colonial America, children of all social classes were apprenticed to families with whom they lived, worked, and learned a trade. During the early to mid-1800's, orphan asylums were commonly used to care for the needs of poor children. However, by the late 1800's, agencies began the practice of paying foster families to care for children, so that children would not have to be put out to work in these

homes. This "boarding out" system eventually developed into today's foster family care system (Hasci, 1995).

During the early 1900's, the practice of placing children in foster homes was favored by many because it was believed that children were better served in a family environment than in an institution (Karger & Stoesz, 1998). A shift in governmental policies, along with an increase in government funding, created changes in the foster care system. As changes in governmental policies began to occur, policies were implemented for licensing, regulating, and monitoring the agencies that found foster homes for children (Krager & Stoesz, 1998).

Throughout the mid-1900's, several legislative acts affected the placing out of children to foster homes (Karger & Stoesz, 1998). The creation of Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which was funded under Title IV of the Social Security Act of 1935, provided funds to impoverished families who otherwise would have lost their children to the foster care system. The aid provided to those families who were at risk of losing their children to the foster care system appeared to help in reducing the number of children that came into the system during the 1940's and 1950's (Karger & Stoesz, 1998).

However, by the 1960's and 1970's, there was a new social awareness of child abuse in the United States that precipitated an increase in child abuse reports and consequently resulted in more children being placed in the foster care system than ever before (Hasci, 1995).

During the last two decades, the most significant federal legislation to be passed regarding foster care was the Adoption Assistance Child Welfare Act of 1980 (Hasci, 1995). This new legislation provided monies to target and provide preventive services to families and their children in an effort to prevent the breakup of the family. In addition, this legislation provided funds and services that would help in the reunification of families (Hasci, 1995). Despite these legislative changes, the number of foster children in the foster care system continues to be high, and, as a result, the need for foster families to provide stable homes for foster children continues to be great (Harrison & Johnson, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine what factors contribute to a foster family's ability and desire to remain active in fostering after two years. This study examined why some families continue to foster for longer

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than two years and why others quit within the first two years.

Foster families are an intricate part of the child welfare system in the United States, as they help to provide for the needs of foster children. As a result, the retention of foster families is extremely important as it allows families to provide long-term care to a child during their time in the system. Ideally, this scenario allows for a child to experience healthy emotional growth and to be able to form lasting emotional relationships. However, when a family is unwilling to continue to provide care to a child during such time, the child's development is impeded (Stone & Stone, 1987).

Therefore, determining what factors keep foster families active in foster care is an important task for foster care agencies to address given the limited pool of potential foster families.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

Given the increase in the number of foster children that are currently in the foster care system and the limited number of foster families, the result of this study may impact the manner in which foster families are recruited and retained. That is, if foster care agencies

are able to identify those factors that influence a foster family's capacity to foster for at least two years, they can than develop a screening tool to identify such families.

By understanding the reasons why foster families continue or cease to foster, foster care providers may identify families that will be more likely to provide the consistent level of care that foster children need. Furthermore, the results of this study may help social workers provide foster families with the support, education, and skills necessary to foster for an extended period of time.

This study seeks to understand the characteristics of both foster parents who cease to foster and those who continue beyond two years. The following hypotheses are made: it is hypothesized that foster families who continue to foster for more than two years have a lower personal family income than those who quit before two years; it is also hypothesized that the foster mothers' and foster fathers' age, marital status, number of birth children, available space for foster children, and the size of the foster mothers' and foster fathers' family of origin may impact the amount of time that they remain active caring for foster children.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The retention of foster families is essential, given

that the number of foster homes has decreased while the

number of foster children coming into the system has

increased (Harrison & Johnson, 1994). A major concern of

the child welfare system in placing a child in a foster

home is the risk that the placement will not be

successful. The results of an unsuccessful placement can

damage a child's ability to establish emotional

relationships as the child is often traumatized by the

repeated moves from foster homes and by the experience of

separation and loss (Stone & Stone, 1987). Therefore, it

is important to screen the foster families that will be

providing for the needs of foster children and to identify

the factors that influence their decision to become foster

parents.

This section discusses literature on foster parents

from an ecological perspective, examines the reasons why

some foster families cease to foster, and analyzes the

factors that influence a foster family's ability to remain

active in fostering.

Theory Guiding Conceptualization

In framing the question for exploration, the ecological perspective is considered as the guiding theory. The ecological perspective focuses on the relationship between an organism/human being and its environment. It suggests that the social focus is on refining and enhancing the relationship between the person and the environment, which in turn allows the individual to utilize his adaptive potential and environmental qualities (Germain & Bloom, 1999).

This perspective does not place blame on either the individual or the environment; instead, it suggests that problems arise from the interaction between the individual and the surrounding environment. Therefore, the focus is on increasing the individual's potential for adapting and on influencing the environment's ability to be responsive to human needs. This point of view assumes that the person and the environment are directly related and that each shapes the other.

Life events, such as an illness, affect the interaction between the person and the environmental fit, resulting in a stressful situation. How the individual reacts to stressful situations will depend on the

individual's past experiences, age, race, sex, and cultural norms (Germain & Bloom, 1999).

This perspective provides a conceptualization for the study of child welfare issues, particularly when one considers that foster families are intricately tied to their biological families, the foster children and their families, and the child welfare system. Foster families, much like the foster children, rely on external sources of support to continue to develop skills that will assist them to continue to care for children and remain active in foster care. For the foster families, these resources of support include their families, the community, the social workers, and their agencies (Milner, 1987). By focusing on more than one element, including family, social workers, environment, and the relationships among these elements, a more complete image emerges of the transactions that occur (Milner, 1987). Thus, it is suggested that these transactions form the basis for success or failure in the foster care component of our child welfare system.

Foster Parenting

Most of the research on foster parenting has focused on the reasons why foster families ceased to foster, while minimal research has been conducted on the retention of

foster families (Cautley & Aldridge, 1975; Chamberlin et al., 1992; Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Rodwell & Biggerstaff, 1995; & Sanchirico et al., 1998). It is important to understand the differences between foster families who cease to foster and those who continue to foster, given the demands of the modern foster care system on foster families and the impact on foster children.

Motivation for Fostering

Potential foster families typically express many motivating factors for wanting to care for foster children. Some of these factors include issues of infertility, adoption, increasing family size, enjoying and wanting to help a child, providing a companion for an only child or for oneself, fulfilling the need for foster homes in the community, religious reasons, and substituting a child that is grown and perhaps has left the home (Denby, Rindfleisch, & Bean, 1999).

In a 1987 study, Dando and Minty set out to identify the characteristics, personal backgrounds, and motivations of a group of foster mothers who had foster children in their homes for one year or more. The foster mothers' main motivation factors and childhood experiences were compared with ratings given by the social workers for their

excellence as foster parents. The study demonstrated that there are two main motivational factors that account for a foster mother's success. First, the desire to parent a child when the potential foster mother could not have her own, and second, their identification with deprived children stemming from their own experiences as children. This study also found that foster mothers who were motivated to foster because of social concern and altruism were identified by social workers as having an increased ability to care for foster children.

Pre-Certification Training

In a study by Baum, Crase, and Crase (2001), aspects of foster parent pre-certification training that might affect a potential foster family's decision to become foster parents were evaluated. When 175 potential foster parents were asked what had helped them the most in making their decisions to become foster parents, 73% of them had made their decision to foster prior to coming into training and stated that the training served to reinforce their decision to become foster parents. Participants felt that the group process, having a certified foster parent share their experiences, and having a trainer with a positive attitude, effective speaking skills, and group

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discussion leadership skills, were also important aspects of their decision to become foster parents. In addition to the methods utilized in training, some respondents felt that the content presented in training was useful in their decision to become foster parents.

When families were informed about the function of the welfare system and trained on what to expect and how to handle different situations, it influenced their decision to become foster parents. These findings suggest that pre-certification training serves the purpose of mutual selection.

On the other hand, foster families who do not attend any type of pre-certification training are more likely to stop fostering than those who complete some form of pre-certification training (Ryan, 1985). Ryan found that approximately 32% of the families who are not trained stop fostering shortly after getting licensed. Conversely, only 11% of foster families receiving some form of training stop fostering within two years or less.

Foster Families who Cease to Foster

There are a number of reasons why foster families decide to stop foster care services. In a study on foster home closures in Alaska conducted by Baring-Gould, Essick,

Kleinkauf, and Miller (1983), it was found that foster

families stopped fostering for the following reasons: 1)

they encountered a life event such as relocation, birth of

child, health problems, changes in employment, and death

of a spouse; and 2) they felt that they were not being

supported by the agency staff, had poor communication with

social workers, and received inadequate services. It is

estimated that between 20% (Ryan, 1985; Triseliotis,

Borlan, & Hill, 1998) and 65% of foster families stopped

fostering for the above mentioned reasons (Baring-Gould et

al., 1983).

Foster parents also stop fostering because of the

stress caused by caring for foster children (Triseliotis,

Borlan, & Hill, 1998). Examples include difficult

behaviors presented by the foster children, allegations of

abuse made against the foster parent, and a lack of

respite care (Baring-Gould et al., 1983; Triseliotis,

Borlan, & Hill, 1998). Additionally, many foster families

quit because of conflicts in relationships with their own

birth children (Baring-Gould et al., 1983; Triseliotis et

al., 1998).

Chamberlain, Moreland, and Reid (1992) conducted a

study that focused on whether providing foster families

with increased support and training would affect a foster

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family's willingness to continue to foster. They also wanted to know if providing families with an additional monthly stipend of $75.00 a month per child would affect drop-out rates. The results of their study indicated that increasing the level of support and training to foster families, along with an increase in their stipends, decreased the drop-out rate by two-thirds during their two-year study. It is to note that even the study's control group had a significant decrease in its drop-out rate, perhaps suggesting that any amount of attention given to foster families may motivate them to continue to foster.

While most of the studies on foster families have focused on foster families that have exited the foster care programs, there have been several recent studies that have looked at factors that contribute to the retention of foster families.

Foster Families who Continue to Foster

In a study conducted by Rhoes, Orme, and Buehler (2001), the researchers examined why some foster families continue to foster whereas others do not. They found that most foster families quit because of a lack of agency support, poor communication, difficulties in children's

behavior, and a lack of input in the children's future. These findings have been well documented in previous research studies.

Rhodes et al., (2001) found that foster families that plan to continue to foster received continuous training before and after certification. These findings suggest that providing foster families with continuous training will increase the time that they remain active in foster care. In addition, researchers found that foster families who plan to continue to foster were more aware of agency policies and procedures, the nature of foster care, the role of a foster parent, and the expectations of the agency (Rhodes et al., 2001).

In a study of predictors of foster parents' satisfaction and intent to continue to foster, Denby, Rindfleisch, and Bean (1999) found that feeling competent to handle children who are placed, wanting to take children who need love, and being acknowledged for a job well done, along with the support, training, and professional regard given to foster parents, are contributing factors to a foster family's intent to continue to foster.

Barth, Courtney, Berrick, and Albert (1994) found that foster parents who provide specialized care receive a

higher reimbursement rate, which has contributed to their decision to foster. They found that the level of reimbursement remains an important factor to consider when recruiting potential foster parents. Therefore, a higher reimbursement rate becomes an important factor in the retention of foster families that must be considered.

Summary

The literature reveals that many research studies have focused on the reasons why some foster families cease to foster. On the other hand, few studies have focused on identifying the reasons why so many foster families continue to foster in a system that is so demanding (Cautley & Aldridge, 1975; Chamberlin et al., 1992; Rhodes et al., 2001; Rodwell & Biggerstaff, 1995; Sanchirico et al., 1998). Additional research needs to focus on the reasons why foster families remain active in fostering and why others decide to stop fostering after relatively short periods of time.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This section describes the study design that was used to conduct this research, the sample from which the data was obtained, and the instrument that was used in the collection of the data. In addition, this section explains what data was collected, the dependent and independent variables that were considered, and how each variable was measured. The procedures that guided the collection of the data and the statistical tests that were used to analyze the data are also outlined.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics of those foster families that stop fostering after less than two years and those that continue to foster for more than two years from the date they first became foster parents. It was hypothesized that foster families who continue to foster have a lower income than those who quit. For the purpose of this study, personal income was operationally defined as income earned by foster parents from any form of employment or any other

source, other than the monies received for the care of foster children.

It was also hypothesized that a foster parent's age, marital status, number of years of marriage, number of birth children, initial reasons for wanting to foster, and the size of family of the origin would predict the amount of time that the foster parent remains active caring for foster children.

This research used a quantitative descriptive design that examined closed and open case files of foster families who were actively fostering and foster families who had ceased to foster prior to two years. Utilizing a quantitative descriptive study design allows for the discovery of relationships and factual information that can be generalized. This research approach is measurable, objective, reduces uncertainty, lends itself to duplication, and utilizes standardized procedures that are believed to bring about the most unbiased and true knowledge (Grinnell, 2001).

The data collected will help to identify the characteristics of foster families who have stopped fostering prior to two years, as well as those families that have been able to foster for longer than two years.

Sampling

The sample of this research was selected from Bienvenidos Foster Family Agency (BFFA), a private, non-profit, social service organization in the Los Angeles area. Only the foster families that were certified and decertified between 1997 and 2002 were considered because it was during this time that the agency began to use a formal training model to train potential foster parents. In addition, only those foster families that had been fostering for more than two years were selected.

At the time of this study, Bienvenidos Foster Family Agency had 135 foster families that were actively fostering. However, only 30 families had been fostering for more than two years. All thirty families were used for this study. On the other hand, a total of 146 foster families were decertified between 1997 and 2002. Of the 146 decertified foster families, 66 were decertified before completing two years. For this study, only 33 decertified families were randomly selected.

The focus was of the research was on reviewing the files of the foster families that had been actively fostering for more than two years and those who stopped fostering before two years between 1997 and 2002.

Data Collection and Instruments

The following information was gathered from the files of foster families that stopped fostering within two years and those that had continued to foster for more than two years. The foster family's personal income, age, marital status, number of years of marriage, number of birth children, available space for foster children, initial reasons for wanting to foster, foster mother's age, foster father's age, number of hours of pre-certification training, and size of their families of origin. These variables were measured using a nominal and ordinal level of measurement.

For the purpose of this study, a data collection instrument was created by utilizing the questions asked in the foster care application (Appendix A). Therefore, the data collected consisted of the answers provided by the foster family at the time of application.

The face validity of the instrument created to collect the data from the foster family's file was tested by submitting it to the Bienvenidos Pre-Certification Specialist for review and critique. This individual is responsible for reviewing the foster family's file for accuracy and completion. This individual was the most

appropriate person for this task as she is extremely familiar with the questions asked on the application.

The strength of this instrument lies in that the questionnaire was created using the questions from the foster care application. By the same standards, a major limitation was that the questions were limited to only those questions asked on the foster parent application.

The researcher received permission from the Executive Director of Bienvenidos Foster Family Agency with a letter granting permission for the researcher to conduct the study (Appendix B.)

Protection of Human Subjects

All data for this research study was gathered from case files; therefore, contact with human subjects was not necessary for the completion of this study. Each file was assigned a random number for identification purposes and to ensure confidentiality. In addition, all collected data was kept safe and secure.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics used to describe the study population. Percentages and frequencies were used to present the demographic information. The demographic information included the

following: income, age, marital status, length of

marriage, number of biological children, initial reasons

for wanting to foster, and the size of families of origin.

A bivariate Pearson r correlation analysis was used to

identify significant correlations between active and

inactive foster parents. An independent T-Test was used to

examine the differences between both groups of foster

parents.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a

description of the study design, the sample population

chosen, and the tool that was created to collect the data.

In addition, the instruments and procedures used to

analyze the data are presented as well as the procedures

that were used to ensure confidentiality and validity of

this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to describe the significant differences between active and inactive foster families. The demographic frequencies are presented in order to provide a description of the sample examined. Pearson r analyses and independent T-Test results are included in this section. In addition, tables are presented in order to provide a visual description of the data analysis results and demographic information.

Presentation of the Findings

The sample for this research project consisted of 63 (N = 63) certified and decertified foster families. Of this total sample, 30 (N = 30) foster families had been fostering for more than two years, and 33 (N = 33) were decertified prior to completing two years. The majority of the active foster families fell within the 45-49 age range at 43.6%. The median age was 47. On the other hand, the majority of the inactive foster families fell within the 34-47 age range at 54.6%. The median age was 40.

The sample for the active families consisted of Hispanic mothers 90%, Hispanic fathers 80%, African

American mothers 10%, African American fathers 6.7%, and Asian fathers 3.3%. On the other hand, the sample for the inactive families consisted of Hispanic mothers 63.7%, Hispanic fathers 45.5%, African American mothers 12.1%, African American fathers 9.1%, Caucasian mothers and fathers 12.1%, Asian mothers and fathers 9.1%, and other 3%.

With regards to the foster mothers' first language, Spanish was the primary language for both active foster mothers 90% and inactive foster mothers 63.6%. Approximately 50% of both active and inactive foster mothers were bilingual. Similarly, Spanish was the primary language for active foster fathers 80% and inactive foster fathers 48.5. Unlike the foster mothers, only 33.3% of active foster fathers were bilingual, while 48.5% of the inactive foster fathers were bilingual.

With regards to marital status, 86% of the active foster families were married, 33% were single, 3.3% were common law spouses, and 6.7% were divorced. On the other hand, 69.7% of the inactive foster families were married, 15.1% were single, 6.1% were common law spouses, 6.1% were divorced, and 3% were separated. In terms of length of marriage, 26.7% of active foster families had been married from 3-13 years, 30% from 14-22 years, 20% from 23-31

years, 23.3% from 32-50 years, and 10% were single. The length of marriage for inactive foster families was 24.2% from 1-7 years, 27.3% from 8-14 years, 18.2% from 15-24 years, 9.1% from 25-28 years, and 21.2% were single. The mean for length of marriage for active foster families was 19.40 years, and 12.62 years for inactive foster families. In terms of income, 33.3% of active foster families and 36.4% of inactive foster families had an income range of $30,000-$39,999 annually (see Table 1).

The hypothesis that foster families who continue to foster for more than two years have a lower income than those who, cease to foster before two years was not validated by the findings of this study (t = -1.421; p > .05). However, a Bivariate Pearson Product Correlation analysis showed several significant differences between active foster families and inactive foster families. The analysis showed that foster families who had been residing at their place of residence for longer periods of time were more likely to foster for more than two years (Pearson r = -.344, p = < .01); the older the foster mothers are at the time of certification, the more likely they are to be fostering for more than two years (Pearson r = -.398, p = < .01); foster families who have more biological children are more likely to foster for more

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Table 1. Demographics of Active and Inactive Foster
Families

		Active Families			Inactive Families	
		Freq (n)	Per (%)		Freq (n)	Per (%)
Foster Mother's age (N = 30) Active (N = 32) Inactive	36-39 40-44 45-49 50+	5 5 13 7	16.7 16.6 43.4 23.3	23-33 34-39 40-47 48-62 No Mother	9 8 9 7 1	24.2 27.3 27.3 18.2 3.0
Foster Father's Age (N = 27) Active (N = 26) Inactive	33-40 41-44 45-52 52+ No Father	7 4 6 10 3	23.3 13.4 20.0 43.3 10.0	26-31 32-39 40-48 49-65 No Father	5 10 5 6 7	15.2 30.3 15.1 18.2 21.2
Foster Mother's Ethnicity (N = 30) Active (N = 32) Inactive	African American Hispanic	3 27	10.0 90.0	African American Hispanic Caucasian Asian No Mother	4 21 4 3 1	12.1 63.7 12.1 9.1 3.0
Foster Father's Ethnicity (N = 27) Active (N = 26) Inactive	African American Hispanic Asian No Father	2 24 3 3	6.7 80.0 3.3 10.0	African American Hispanic Caucasian Asian Other No Father	3 15 4 3 1 7	9.1 45.5 12.1 9.1 3.0 21.2
Foster Mother's First Language (N = 30) Active (N = 32) Inactive	Spanish English	27 3	90.0 10.0	Spanish English Other No Mother	21 8 3 1	63.6 24.3 9.1 3.0
Foster Father's First Language (N = 27) Active (N = 27) Inactive	Spanish English Other No Father	24 2 1 3	80.0 6.7 3.3 10.0	Spanish English Other No Father	16 7 3 7	48.5 21.2 12.1 18.2
Is the Foster Mother Bilingual (N = 30) Active (N = 33) Inactive	Yes No	15 15	50.0 50.0	Yes No No Mother	16 15 2	48.5 45.4 6.1
Is the Foster Father Bilingual (N = 27) Active (N = 26) Inactive	Yes No No Father	10 17 3	33.3 56.7 10.0	Yes No No Father	15 11 7	45.5 33.3 21.2

	Active Families			Inactive Families		
		Freq (n)	Per (%)		Freq (n)	Per (%)
Foster Parents' Marital Status (N = 30) Active (N = 33) Inactive	Married Single Common Law Divorced	26 1 1 2	86.7 3.3 3.3 6.7	Married Single Common Law Divorced Separated	23 5 2 2 1	69.7 15.1 6.1 6.1 3.0
Length of Marriage (N = 30) Active (N = 33) Inactive	3-13 yrs. 14-22 yrs. 23-31 yrs. 32-50 yrs. Single	8 9 6 7 3	26.7 30.0 20.0 23.3 10.0	1-7 yrs. 8-14 yrs. 15-24yrs. 25-28 yrs. Single	8 9 6 10 7	24.2 27.3 18.2 9.1 21.2
Foster Family's Income (N = 30) Active (N = 33) Inactive	$10,000-19,999 $20,000-29,999 $30,000-39,999 $40,000-49,999 $50,000-59,999 $60,000-69,999 $70,000-79,999	3 8 10 6 2 1	10.0 26.7 33.3 20.0 6.7 3.3	$10,000-19,999 $20,000-29,999 $30,000-39,999 $40,000-49,999 $50,000-59,999 $60,000-69,999 $70,000-79,999	5 2 12 7 2 3 2	15.2 6.0 36.4 21.2 6.0 9.1 6.1

than two years (Pearson r = -.399, p = < .01); and the longer the foster parents have been married at the time of certification, the more likely they are to foster for more than two years (Pearson r = -.305, p = < .05) [see table 2].

An independent T-Test analysis demonstrated several significant findings. First, the mean score for the age of the active foster mothers (46.97) was significantly different from that of the inactive foster mothers (40.03) (t = 3,363, df = 60, P = .001). Second, the mean score for the number of years that the foster parents had been married (19.40) was significantly different from that of the inactive foster parents (12.62), (t = 2.349, df = 54,

Table 2. Pearson r Correlations

		Certified Versus Decertified
At the time of certification, how long had the foster family been residing in their home.		
Pearson Correlation	-.344**	1
Sig.(2-tailed)	.007	
N	63	63
At the time of certification, what was the foster mother's age.		
Pearson Correlation	-.398**	1
Sig.(2-tailed)	.001	
N	62	62
At the time of certification, how many biological children did the foster family have		
Pearson Correlation	-.399**	1
Sig.(2-tailed)	.001	
N	63	63
How long had the foster parents been married		
Pearson Correlation	-.305*	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.023	
N	56	56

*p < .05 **p < .01

p = .023). Third, the mean score for the number of years

that the active foster families had been residing in their

home (10.63) was significantly different from that of the inactive families (5.99) (t = 2.816, df = 59, p = .007). Finally, the mean score for the number of biological children that the active foster families had at the time of certification (2.63) was significantly higher than that of the inactive families (1.64) (t = 3.396, df 61, p = .001).

Group statistics demonstrated that both active and inactive foster received a mean of 22 hours of pre-certification training. In addition, 96% of the active foster families and 90% of the inactive foster families were motivated to become foster parents by their desire to help a child.

The average length of time that the active foster families had been fostering was (mean 5.14 yrs). On the other hand, inactive foster families fostered an averaged of (mean 1.09 years). Statistics also demonstrated that 69.7 % of the inactive families were voluntarily decertified while 30.3 % were involuntarily decertified.

Summary

Significant differences were found between foster parents who continue to foster for more than two years and those that stop prior to completing two years. The age of

the foster mother, the length of marriage of the foster
parents, the number of biological children, and the length
of time at their place of residence significantly
correlated with the number of foster families who foster
for more than two years.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine, based on
secondary analysis of case records, the differences
between active and inactive foster families. This chapter
discusses the relationship of the study findings to
existing literature, limitations of the study,
implications for social work practice, and recommendations
for future research.

Discussion

Results of the Bivariate Pearson r correlation and
the Independent t-Test did not reveal any significant
differences in income between active and inactive foster
families. A descriptive analysis indicated that both
groups of parents had an average income of $30,000 to
39,999 annually. This finding suggests that perhaps both
groups of families may foster in order to supplement their
income, considering that this income range is not
consistent with the national income average of most
American families, which is $52,275 (2001 Census).

On the other hand, results from the two above
mentioned statistical tests revealed that there were

statistically significant differences in the foster

mothers' age (p < .01). This demonstrates that the older

the foster mothers are at the time of certification (mean

46.97 years), the more likely they are to foster for more

than two years. Sanchirico (1998) suggests that foster

parents who are older indicate more satisfaction with

fostering than younger foster parents.

Another significant finding was that foster parents

who have been married for longer periods of time (mean

19.40 years) were more likely to foster for more than two

years. Baum (2001) suggests that foster families in a

stable relationship are more likely to be satisfied with

their decision to foster.

In addition, the number of years that a foster family

has been residing at their place of residence (mean 10.63

years) significantly correlated with the families who had

been actively fostering (p < .01). Although prior research

has not identified a foster family's length of time at

their current residence as a predictor of success in

fostering, this study found that it is significant.

Finally, a correlation was found between the number

of birth children that the foster family had at the time

of certification (Mean 2.63) and the active foster

families. Sanchirico (1998) suggests that foster parents

with biological children at home express greater satisfaction with fostering.

Prior research demonstrates that there is a relationship between the foster care system and a foster care agency's ability to recruit and retain its foster parents (Jones, 1995; Titterington, 1990).

Group statistics revealed that both groups of foster families received an average of 22 hours of pre-certification training; however, this statistic did not account for differences between active and inactive foster families. Baum, Crase, and Crase, (2001) suggest that pre-certification training serves to reinforce a foster family's decision to become foster parents; however, a foster family's decision to remain active in foster care often depends on other factors, such as the level of support received from the social worker, the agency, and their families.

Another finding that was revealed through group statistics was that 96% of the active families and 90% of the inactive families were motivated to foster in order to help a child. This finding is also consistent with prior research on motivating factors that influence a foster parent's decision to foster (Dando & Minty, 1987; Denby, Rindfleisch, & Bean, 1999).

Limitations

The findings of this study had a number of limitations due to the single agency location and the small sample size. The instrument developed by the researcher was limited to the questions asked in the application completed by the foster family prior to certification.

Additionally, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the general population, as approximately 75% of the participants were primarily Hispanic families.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Currently, many foster care agencies continue to compete for a limited number of viable foster families. Therefore, social work practitioners must be able to thoroughly assess, train, and support current and potential foster families. A large portion of this study's sample population was comprised of Hispanic foster families and few researchers have focused on the contributions and impact that these families have on the foster care system and the children. Therefore, it is recommended that further research be considered within the Hispanic foster family population. The focus of the research should be on asking Hispanic foster parents what

services and resources made a significant difference in their decision to continue to foster. While much has been learned from this study about the characteristics of successful foster families, there is a great need for further research in the recruitment and retention of Hispanic foster families.

Conclusions

This study examined demographic information from case files in order to attempt to identify the differences between foster families who continue to foster for more than two years and those that quit before two years.

The findings revealed that a foster mothers' age, length of marriage, number of biological children, and the length of time at the family's place of residence are significant factors that must be looked at when recruiting potential foster families.

The literature identifies a social worker's and foster family agency's capacity to provide training and support to foster families as an extremely significant factor that must be considered in order to allow families to care for foster children on a long term basis and thus continue to foster for a significant number of years

(Baum, 1987; Cambell & Downs, 1987; Milner, 1987; & Ryan, 1985).

Therefore, it is important to continue examined what can be done to help foster families continue to provide consistent care to foster children, as their decision to quit or remain active impacts the emotional stability of foster children while in placement.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Foster Parent Survey

1. At the time of certification, what was the foster mother's age? _____

2. At the time of certification, what was the foster father's age? _____

3. What is the foster mother's ethnic background?
    - ☐ Caucasian
    - ☐ African American
    - ☐ Hispanic/Latino
    - ☐ Asian
    - ☐ American Indian
    - ☐ Other _____

4. What is the foster father's ethnic background?
    - ☐ Caucasian
    - ☐ African American
    - ☐ Hispanic/Latino
    - ☐ Asian
    - ☐ American Indian
    - ☐ Other _____

5. What is the foster mother's first language?
    Spanish _____ English _____ Other _____

6. What is the foster father's first language?
    Spanish _____ English _____ Other _____

7. Is the foster mother bilingual?   Yes ____ No _____

8. Is the foster father bilingual?   Yes ____ No _____

9. At the time of certification, what was the foster parent's marital status?
    Married _____ Single ____ Separated _____ Common Law ____

10. How long had the foster parents been married?
    _____ years _____ months

11. Excluding foster care payments, what was the total combined income of the foster family?

$0 – $9,999 _____
$10,000 – $19,999 _____
$20,000 – $29,999 _____
$30,000 -- $39,990 _____
$40,000 -- $49,999 _____
$50,000 -- $60,999 _____
$70,000 -- $80,000 _____
$80,000 – Above _____

12. At the time of certification, did both foster parents work?
Yes _____ No _____

13. If no, who was employed?
Foster mother _____ Foster father _____

14. How many hours does the foster father work?
0-19 Hours _____ 20-29 Hours _____ 30-39 Hours _____
40-49 Hours _____ 50-59 Hours _____ 60-69 Hours _____

15. How many hours does the foster mother work?
0-19 Hours _____ 20-29 Hours _____ 30-39 Hours _____
40-49 Hours _____ 50-59 Hours _____ 60-69 Hours _____

16. At the time of certification, where did the foster family reside?
House _____ Apartment _____ Condominium _
Townhouse _____ Mobile Home _____

17. At the time of certification, did the foster family own or rent?
Own _____ Rent/Lease _____

18. How many bedrooms does the foster family's home have?
2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____

19. At the time of certification, how long had the foster family been residing in their home? _____ years _____ months

20. At the time of certification, how many children did the foster family have?
Biological _____
Adopted _____
Step-children _____
Foster Children _____

21. At the time of certification, how many of the foster parents' children were still living at home? _____

22. What motivated the foster family to become foster parents?
    ☐ To help a child
    ☐ To have company for their child
    ☐ To help the community
    ☐ To be able to stay home with their own children
    ☐ To supplement their income
    ☐ To be able to adopt a child
    ☐ Other _____

23. How long was/has the foster family been certified as a foster family?
    _____ years _____ months

24. How many foster children was the foster family certified to care for?
    _____

25. What was the age range of the children that the foster family preferred to foster?
    From _____ to _____ years old.

26. What was the total number of foster children that the foster family cared for during their first two years in foster care? _____

27. In the foster mother's family of origin, how many siblings did she have?
    _____

28. In the foster father's family of origin, how many siblings did he have?
    _____

29. How many hours of pre-certification training did the foster mother receive? Number of Hours _____

30. How many hours of pre-certification training did the foster father receive? Number of Hours _____

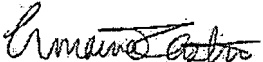31. Was the foster family voluntarily_____ or involuntarily_____ decertified?

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION LETTER

BIENVENIDOS

foster family agency

"Keeping Families Together"

Date: January 27, 2003

To: CSUSB Institutional Review Board

From: Lorraine Castro, Executive Director

Subject: Consent for Alberto Ramirez

This letter is written in support of Alberto Ramirez's request to conduct a study regarding the retention of foster family in the Bienvenidos Foster Family Agency. I am aware of the research proposal and date collection instrument, and I will approve for Mr. Alberto Ramriez to collect the data needed for the study from Bienvenidos Foster Family Agency's closed and active foster family files.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this matter, please feel free to contact me at (626) 798-7222

_____   1/31/02
Lorraine Castro, Executive Director   Date

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