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EFFECTS OF SIBLING PLACEMENTS ON STABILITY
AND PERMANENCY IN FOSTER CARE

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
Andrea Trinidad Lomeli
June 2012

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AND PERMANENCY IN FOSTER CARE

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June 2012

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess overall placement stability and permanency in joint or separate sibling placements within the San Bernardino Department of Children and Family Services. Secondary data were collected from the agency. The sample consisted of 338 children between the ages 4-13; who entered and exited care between 2008 and 2010; and who had no more than 3 siblings. Children who were placed with "All," "Some," or "None" of their siblings were assessed in terms of their permanency outcome, number of placement changes, out of home placement length, and total case length. A significant difference was found between sibling placement status and permanency outcome which indicated that children placed with "All" their siblings were more likely to be adopted than children placed with "Some" or "None" of their siblings. Another significant difference was found between the length of out of home placement and sibling placement status which revealed that children who were placed with "All" of their siblings stayed longer in placements than children who were placed with "None" of their siblings. This study found a significant difference between children who were placed with "All" or "Some" siblings vs. "None" and total case

length. Also, there was a significant difference between children who were placed with "All" or "Some" siblings vs. "None" and total out of home placement length. It is recommended that further research is needed to expand the sample criteria and address what social-emotional problems children who are separated from their siblings are affected by.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Department of Children and Family Services of San Bernardino County for their contribution of secondary data by the research unit to this study. I am thankful for Sally Richter, SSSP who guided me through this process.

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I would like to thank all my family and friends for their encouragement and support during the whole process of this research project.

DEDICATION

To my Mom, Dad, Twin Brother, and Special Sister who have stood by me throughout this whole process of this project. All of you have always been a part of my motivation to succeed this far in my education. I have always appreciated you all for keeping me in your thoughts and prayers. Thank you for always being supportive and believing in me. I love you all so much with all my heart.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The idea of foster family care was first put into practice by Reverend Charles Loring Brace, who founded the New York Children's Aid Society in 1853. His simple vision was to take children who were homeless and had no family from the streets of New York and send them to rural regions of the country to be placed on farms with families to work and be cared for (Poppo & Leighninger, 2008). The placement of siblings has been an issue among child welfare since the early history of when these orphan trains transported children toward the west "and has persisted throughout the historical development of child welfare services, although never as a major theme" (Hegar, 2005, p.717).

A large amount of the children in foster care are siblings. "Estimates of the percentage of foster children and former foster children who are siblings range from 87% to 98%" (Staff & Fein, 1992, p.258). Child welfare researchers and policy makers have good reason to focus their attention to sibling placements because of these

statistics. Corder (1999) has reported that The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse presented that about "65-85% of U.S. foster children come from sibling groups, and studies of siblings in the child welfare system suggest that about 60% to 73% of U.S. foster children have siblings who also enter foster care" (as cited in Hegar, 2005, p.718).

More currently, it has been viewed and stated that "the preservation and maintenance of sibling relationships in child welfare settings have begun to come to the forefront of practice and policy considerations" (Shlonsky, Bellamy, Elkins, & Ashare, 2005, p.697). For example, in 2008, President George W. Bush signed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act which was a major legislation that made numerous changes to child welfare practice, and of particular interest of these changes were the provisions concerning sibling placement and reasonable efforts (Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2010). Research and advocacy groups have pointed to the important role of siblings, and the need to place siblings together or to at least arrange sibling contact while separated.

Looking at a more local scope, over two-thirds of children placed in foster care throughout California had a

sibling who was also in foster care. By California law, public child welfare agencies are required to "identify siblings of children who enter the child welfare system, to place siblings together if possible, and to make diligent efforts to provide for ongoing and frequent interaction among siblings when placement together is not possible" (Lery, Shaw, & Magruder, 2005, p.784). This policy comes from the California Welfare and Institutions Code section 16002 which provides the mandate for the joint placement of siblings. This policy requires that when siblings cannot be placed together, social workers must explain why siblings are not placed together. This policy applies to all public child welfare agencies across the state of California and social workers working directly under these agencies must abide by this policy when deciding whether or not a sibling group needs to be separated. However, according to Lery et al. (2005), "only 42% of those children who had siblings in care were placed with all of their siblings and 32% were not placed with any of their siblings" (p. 784). Furthermore, another study of foster children placed in California who had siblings in care presented that about 46% of them were placed with all their siblings, and 66% of

them were placed with at least one sibling (Shlonsky, Webster, & Needell, 2003).

All in all, it is observed that although past and current practice guidelines have supported the placement of siblings in the same foster home placements whenever possible, sibling groups are still separated very often. Therefore, it is important to investigate and assess the impact of joint or separate sibling placements. Some studies, such as Staff and Fein (1992) and Grigsby (1994), have found negative outcomes for children placed separately from their siblings. However, there has been other studies from literature that presents negative outcomes when placing siblings together (Ward, 1984; Aldridge & Cautley, 1976). Placing siblings together is more complex than placing siblings apart because it is harder for siblings to integrate into a placement due to their strong sibling bond (Ward, 1984). Furthermore, placing siblings together is more difficult to take place because it results in children waiting longer for an appropriate foster or adoptive family (Aldridge & Cautley, 1976). This study hoped to contribute in closing this gap of conflicting research and to further show the importance for current and future social work

practice to study sibling placement in foster care and the well-being of children and their siblings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess overall placement stability and permanency of children in joint or separate sibling placements within the San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services. After all, the purpose of child welfare agencies is the safety, protection, and permanency of children and the promotion of child and family well-being. Therefore, it is important to research the effects of sibling placements in foster care.

A controversial issue that is seen in cases within child welfare agencies is the decision of whether to separate sibling sets within a placement. Sometimes within placements, one sibling may act out and be difficult to parent. This can result in a caregiver not wanting to foster or adopt the 'problem child,' but the caregiver still wants to adopt the child's siblings. This leads to the dilemma of whether to take all siblings out of the placement to keep them together in a new placement or to only remove the sibling that is causing problems within the placement so other siblings can finally have a permanent

home. Furthermore, the Department of Children and Family Services, along with many social workers, are also concerned with this issue and frequently want to keep children with their siblings when placed in foster care. Social workers practice placing siblings together because they know it is of their best interests and a way to decrease their feelings of helplessness, loss, and abandonment.

Since policies are not the 'end all' of keeping siblings from being separated within placement in foster care, more research is needed on the impact on foster children who become placed together or separated from their siblings. Therefore, social workers can know what to prepare for or what to expect as a result when making the decision of placing siblings together or separately. This quantitative study involved the collection of secondary data from the Case Management System (CMS) database through the Department of Children and Family Services in San Bernardino County. The time, cost, and other resources saved by avoiding collection of original data were a distinct advantage of secondary analysis. This method was preferred because it would have been difficult

to find an appropriate sample and a low response rate was anticipated.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

Sibling relationships can be seen as an important aspect to the emotional well-being of children in foster care and can have important implications for permanency planning. This is why it's important that practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers within this field are informed of the types of outcomes that different placement arrangements could have for children who have siblings in foster care. Overall, it's important to understand the issue of sibling placements in foster care much further if social work research is to continue to support children and families to the best of their ability.

The findings of this study intended to contribute to child welfare social work practice. It was intended this study's findings would possibly allow child welfare agencies, specifically Children and Family Services in San Bernardino County, to re-evaluate how they place sibling sets within foster care to further increase stability and permanency within placements if need be. Social workers are very concerned with the well-being of children and this

study intended to look more into this issue of sibling placements in order to contribute to the improvement of the well-being of children placed in foster care.

Furthermore, the findings of this study intended to contribute to social work policy by allowing administrators and policy makers to learn more about the effects of sibling placements. This can allow them to grant future sibling placement policies and political decisions which can best serve children who have siblings in foster care. Understanding if children who are placed together with all, some, or none of their siblings can possibly increase the likelihood of adoption, placement with legal guardian, or reunification with family, could guide policies that are related to increasing permanency outcomes.

Lastly, the findings of this study intended to contribute to social work research by expanding the knowledge and closing the gaps of conflicting research of sibling placement within foster care.

The phases of the generalist intervention process such as assessing and planning can be impacted by this study. The findings of this study are informational for social workers in child welfare settings who deal with the placement of children who also have siblings within foster

care. During the assessing phase, child welfare social workers are able to use the findings from this study to be able to better assess the type of placement that is best for sibling sets in order to increase their stability and permanency within placements. The findings are intended to help child welfare social workers during the planning phase of the generalist model so that they are more competent to plan the best possible permanency outcome for siblings in foster care.

The research question used to guide this study is: What is the overall placement stability and permanency of children in joint or separate sibling placements? The results of this study are intended to influence future research on social work practice concerning sibling placement in foster care.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents current literature pertaining to sibling placement within foster care. Specifically, literature regarding what is currently known when studying the placement stability and permanency of children in joint or separate placements. Furthermore, this literature review addresses the theoretical perspectives that have guided past research and those that will guide this study.

Sibling Placement and Stability and Permanency

Over the years, there has not been too much empirical evidence on what is best for children in foster care in regards to placing them with all, some, or none of their siblings. Past literature has shown that joint sibling placement is related to better placement stability. In their study, Staff and Fein (1992) "found that siblings placed together were more likely to remain in their first placements and less likely to experience placement disruption than siblings who were separated" (as cited in Smith, 1998, p.339). But contrary to this finding, Staff

and Fein (1992) also found that "those siblings who were placed together were more likely to both be moved simultaneously than siblings who were separated from one another" (as cited in Smith, 1998, p.339). Staff and Fein (1992) had a study design where all children placed in foster care by all Casey Family Services' offices from the beginning of the program in 1976 through September 1900 were in their study. This included the children who emancipated from Casey care, the children who returned to state care before age 18, and the children who still were in care after varying amounts of time. Staff and Fein (1992) had a sample of 262 children in their study and included the information on basic demographics, placement history at Casey Family Services, and sibling history were obtained for each child from the case records and from discussion with staff members (Staff & Fein, 1992). Staff and Fein (1992) chose placement stability as an outcome measure because of its meaning for permanency planning and because it was relatively easy to obtain from case records. They defined placement stability by examining disruption rates. Overall, their implications for practice included that placing siblings together was a successful child welfare practice. Staff and Fein's (1992) other

implications for practice showed that placing siblings apart is not a problem if the minimization of placement disruptions is the goal. They saw that disruption might not be the ultimate measure of placement success, but that family connection, adjustment in the placement, and other qualitative considerations should be part of the whole picture of placement success.

According to Thorpe and Swart (1992), in their study, they "also found that children separated from their siblings experienced a greater number of placements over time than siblings who remained together while in care, although the amount of time spent in care was the same regardless of placement status" (as cited in Smith, 1998, p.339). The purpose of their study was to search the reasons why children are separated from their siblings in foster care and their outcomes from information through agency data records. They created a checklist illustrated of child behaviors and family situations and collected information from the agency's closed case records. The researchers looked at a sample of 115 children with siblings while in foster care of a Children's Aid Society, where 53% were eventually placed apart from their siblings in foster care. Thorpe and Swart (1992) found that reasons

for not placing siblings together included "children who are older, who are from large siblings groups, and who have no lasting relationship with adult primary caregivers" (as cited in Smith, 1998, p.390).

Additionally, Hegar (2005), in her "international review of empirical studies of siblings in adoptive and out-of-home care", showed "some evidence that efforts to maintain siblings together may result in more stable placements and better child well-being outcomes" (as cited in Shlonsky, Bellamy, Elkins & Ashare, 2005, p.693). Hegar (2005) reviewed "17 studies from several countries which address definitions and descriptions of sibling groups in care, characteristics of children placed together or separately, and outcomes of sibling placements" (p.717). Hegar (2005) found that most of the studies that examined outcomes of sibling placements suggested that siblings who were placed together had about the same stability or more than siblings who were not placed together. Also, Hegar (2005) found that children who are placed with their siblings do as well or better than when they are not placed with their siblings. Most studies suggested that children in foster care were most likely to be separated from their siblings when they have special needs, enter foster care at

different times than their siblings, when they are at an older age, and when they are further apart in age (Hegar, 2005).

Furthermore, research evidence suggests placing children in foster care together with their siblings is correlated with better placement permanency. Leathers (2005) researched the outcomes for children who were placed together in foster care to the affect rates of reunification and adoption. The study looked at whether children in long-term care constantly resided with their siblings in out-of-home care. Leathers (2005) had a sample of 197 adolescents who were in foster care and used telephone interviews with their social workers and foster parents. In her study, Leathers (2005) found that "placement stability and various permanency outcomes for children are associated with consistently remaining in the same home with their brothers and sisters" (as cited in Shlonsky et al., 2005, p.695). It was found that "sibling placements were not related to reunification rates," which suggested that children who were placed with siblings don't necessarily increase or decrease their chances that they will be reunified with their family (Leathers, 2005, p.813). However, Leathers (2005) found a strong and

unexpected relationship between children who were placed with siblings and adoption. Leathers (2005) found that "children placed with the same number of siblings consistently throughout their stay in foster care had significantly higher chances for adoption or subsidized guardianship than children placed alone" (Leathers, 2005, p.813).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Theories that guided this study were theories such as attachment theory and family systems theory. Attachment theory views that the quality of the child's attachment relationship with at least one primary attachment figure has a significant effect on the child's ability to develop age-appropriate cognitive and socioemotional skills in childhood and adulthood (Lesser & Poper, 2007). As seen in Whelan (2003), "arguments for maintaining siblings in care rest upon the pain of loss that children experience when important relationships are disrupted, leading to an impaired ability to form such relationships or attachments with others over time" (as cited in Shlonsky et al., 2005, p.699).

Family systems theory looks at "the family as a social system that adheres to most of the behavioral rules and assumptions that apply to all social systems and that shares properties of other social systems" (Lesser & Pope, 2007, p.127). In other social systems, such as schools, etc., members can leave for whatever reason and be replaced. However, if a family were to lose a member of their own, they could never be replaced in the sense of the former family member's emotional relationship to the family (Lesser & Pope, 2007). Family systems theory is used to view children and their siblings in foster care, especially when observing "the way in which siblings interact with each other to form healthy or unhealthy subgroups" (Shlonsky, et al., 2005, p.699).

Summary

Overall, the literature review presented that children who have siblings in foster care, and looking at their relationships, are complex and involve many factors that influence placement stability and permanency. According to some of the literature review, it appeared that related agencies to child welfare services have tried to examine this problem related to sibling placements. This study

further examined this issue within the Department of Children and Family Service Agency in San Bernardino County and assessed the overall placement stability and permanency of children in joint or separate sibling placements.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the research methods that are used in this study. Specific contents of this section include the study's design, sampling, data collection, procedures, protection of human subjects, and quantitative data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to assess the overall placement stability and permanency of children in joint or separate sibling placements within the San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services. It is important to research the effects of child placement toward siblings in foster care because the purpose of child welfare agencies is the safety, protection, and permanency of children. This study is a quantitative study involving the analysis of secondary data from the Case Management System (CMS) database through the Department of Children and Family Services in San Bernardino County. The time, cost, and other resources saved by avoiding collection of original data were a distinct advantage of secondary

analysis. This was seen as a preferable method because it would be difficult to find an appropriate sample and a low response rate would have been anticipated. Limitations of the study design include that this study is not necessarily a representative of all children in joint or separate sibling placements within the San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services due to the sampling and selection criteria used for the study.

The research question used to guide this study is:
What is the overall placement stability and permanency of children in joint or separate sibling placements?

Sampling

The sampling size included 338 cases. The sample for this study included children who entered the foster care system along with their siblings in joint (all or some siblings) or separate (no siblings) sibling placements within the San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services. Specifically, the sampling criteria included children (approximately aged 4-13) with no more than three siblings and who entered the foster care system at the same time within the time-period of years 2008-2010 with no prior history of entering foster care. Furthermore,

as part of the sampling criteria, the cases of these children were to be closed by the end of this time-period to be able to assess their permanency outcomes. The determination to obtain the sample within this time-period was to gather information about a more recent generation and to also take into consideration policies that affected sibling placements right before this time such as the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 which were major legislations that made numerous changes to the child welfare system. Therefore, all cases within this time-period should be treated the same when it comes to following policy. Criteria for age was set to be children between the age of 4 through 13 because children the age of 3 and younger face different placement procedures than older children, and children who are older than 13 years old are more difficult to be placed because of the challenges of raising an adolescent.

Data Collection and Instruments

This study collected data on overall placement stability and permanency of children in joint or separate sibling placements. A data extraction form was created as a guide for the collection of the secondary data for this

study (Appendix A). The data extraction form was constructed by compiling important categories necessary for this study, including child's demographic information (gender, age, ethnicity), date they entered and exited the system, number of siblings, whether they were placed with all, some, or none of their siblings, number of placement changes, length (days) of out of home placement, and permanency outcomes (adoption, legal guardianship, reunification). The independent variable of this study was sibling placement status, whether the child was placed with all, some, or none of their siblings and the dependent variables were stability and permanency of the child while within the foster care system. The dependent variable, stability, was operationalized to include the number of times placement was changed and the length of the case and out of home placement. Stability is defined as less or equal to 2 placement changes. Another dependent variable, permanency, was operationalized to include permanency outcomes such as adoption, guardianship, and reunification. Age was measured by using an interval/ratio level of measurement. Other items incorporated in the demographic information section, such as gender and ethnicity, were measured using a nominal level of measurement.

Procedures

This research was approved and received consent from the San Bernardino County Children and Family Services and IRB to conduct the research project. The proposal was reviewed and discussed to see if the variables needed are available within the department's Case Management System (CMS) database. Sally Richter, SSSP contacted the research unit of San Bernardino County Human Services System to do some preliminary data runs to see if variables of study are available to collect the secondary data within the CMS database. After approval from the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino, the data collection was initiated. The legislation and research unit of San Bernardino County Children and Family Services provided the author with a sample size of 338 cases with the necessary data that fit the criteria. Data collection occurred between the months of February and March of 2012.

Protection of Human Subjects

Appropriate measures were taken to ensure the protection of participants in this study. Data collection was not taken directly from participants, therefore the study did not include informed consent or debriefing

statements because it was not necessary nor applicable. Secondary data were extracted from the San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services Case Management System (CMS) database by the research unit in which information was accessible to author only. Client names were not disclosed in research findings. All data from the San Bernardino County of Children and Family Services' database was stored in a private computer file and once data analysis was completed all files were destroyed.

Data Analysis

This study employed quantitative data analysis techniques. Descriptive statistics included frequency distributions, measures of central tendency (e.g. mean, median, mode), and measures of variability (e.g. range, variance, standard deviation). Data analysis employed inferential statistics in order to make an assessment as to the relationship between sibling placement status (independent variables), and stability and permanency (dependent variables) among foster children within the San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services.

Bivariate analysis was conducted between variables. Multiple one-way ANOVAs were conducted when looking at the relationships between sibling placement status and stability. Specifically, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the relationship between sibling placement status and the number of placement changes. Another one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare sibling placement status and the case length. Another one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the relationship between sibling placement status and the length of time in out of home placement. Multiple independent t-tests were calculated since it was observed that the mean scores for "All" and "Some" siblings were very similar when the ANOVA tests were conducted. Specifically, one independent t-test compared the mean case length of children who were placed with "All" or "Some" siblings vs. children who were placed with "None" of their siblings. Another independent t-test compared the mean out of home placement length of children who were placed with "All" or "Some" siblings vs. children who were placed with "None" of their siblings. A chi-square test was run when looking at the relationship between sibling placement status and permanency. Specifically, a chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship

between sibling placement status and whether the permanency outcome was adoption, guardianship, or reunification with family.

Summary

Overall, this chapter presented an overview of the methodology that was used in this study. A quantitative design was used to select data. For data collection purposes, a data extraction form was used as a guide for the collection of secondary data within the agency's database by the legislation and research unit. Also presented in this chapter were the procedures that were used and the appropriate measures employed to protect confidential information. Lastly, discussed was the data analysis for quantitative research which pertained to this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of this quantitative study of the effects of sibling placements on stability and permanency in foster care. Presented are the relevant frequencies and descriptive statistics of the sample, along with the presentation of the bivariate findings.

Presentation of the Findings

Demographic Characteristics

The sample of this study included 338 children who entered the foster care system along with their siblings in joint (all or some siblings) or separate (no siblings) sibling placements within the San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services. Specifically, the sampling criteria included children (approximately aged 4-13) with no more than three siblings and who entered the foster care system at the same time within the time-period of years 2008-2010. Of this sample, about 47% of the siblings were male and about 53% of the siblings were female. The mean age of the sample was 8 years old. In regards to ethnicity, the majority of the sample composed

of siblings who were Hispanic (47%). The rest of the sample included 26% who were African American, about 25% who were White, and approximately 2% fell under other race/ethnic groups. In regards to the number of siblings of a child, approximately 41% had one sibling, 34% had two siblings, and 26% had 3 siblings when removed from the home. In regards to a child's sibling placement status, approximately 43% were placed with "All" their siblings; 24% were placed with "Some" of their siblings; and 33% were placed with "None" of their siblings. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics discussed.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender (N=338)		
Female	178	52.7
Male	160	47.3
Age (N=338, M=7.88)		
4-6	124	36.7
7-9	117	34.6
10-13	97	28.7
Ethnicity (N=338)		
Hispanic	158	46.7
African American	88	26.0
White	86	25.4
Other	6	1.8

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Number of Siblings (N=338)		
One	137	40.5
Two	114	33.7
Three	87	25.7

Case Characteristics

Of this sample, approximately 60% started their case in 2008; 31% started their case in 2009; and 9% started their case in 2010. Approximately 10% ended their case in 2008; 36% ended their case in 2009; and 54% ended their case in 2010. In regards to the number of placement changes, approximately 57% of the sample had one placement change; 29% had two placement changes; 9% had three placement changes; and 6% had four or more placement changes. In regards to placement type while in foster care, approximately 50% of the sample were placed in a foster family agency certified home (FFA); 43% were placed in a relative home; 5% were placed in a foster family home (FFH); 2% were placed with a legal guardian; and 1% were placed in a group home. The mean out of home placement length of the sample was approximately 225 days. The mean of the full case length of the sample was approximately 406

days. In regards to permanency outcome, approximately 92% of the sample were reunified with their family; 4% received guardianship; and 3% were adopted. Table 2 shows the case characteristics discussed.

Table 2. Case Characteristics

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Case Start Date (N=338)		
2008	202	59.8
2009	105	31.1
2010	31	9.2
Case End Date (N=338)		
2008	34	10.1
2009	123	36.4
2010	181	53.6
Sibling Placement Status (N=338)		
All	146	43.2
Some	82	24.3
None	110	32.5
Number of Placement Changes (N=338)		
1	191	56.5
2	97	28.7
3	31	9.2
4 or more	19	5.6
Placement Type (N=338)		
FFA	168	49.7
Relative	144	42.6
FFH	16	4.7
Legal Guardian	6	1.8
Group Home	4	1.2

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Case Length (days) (N=338, M=406.4)		
000-180	70	20.7
181-360	67	19.8
361-540	99	29.2
541-720	61	18.0
721-900	35	10.3
901-1080	5	1.4
Out of Home Placement Length (days) (N=338, M=225.4)		
000-180	147	43.4
181-360	115	34.0
361-540	37	10.9
541-720	34	10.0
721-900	6	1.7
901-1080	0	0.0
Permanency Outcome (N=338)		
Reunification	312	92.3
Guardianship	15	4.4
Adoption	11	3.3

Bivariate Analysis

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare sibling placement status and the number of placement changes. There was no significant difference found between number of placement changes and sibling placement status ($F(2, 335) = .006, p > .05$). Whether a child was placed with all, some, or none of their siblings did not differ significantly with the number of placements. Children who were placed with

"All" of their siblings had a mean number of placement changes of 1.65 ($SD = .81$). Children who were placed with "Some" of their siblings had a mean number of placement changes of 1.66 ($SD = .98$). Children who were placed with "None" of their siblings had a mean number of placement changes of 1.66 ($SD = 1.03$).

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare sibling placement status and the case length. There was no significant difference found between total case length and sibling placement status ($F(2,335)=2.54, p > .05$). Whether a child was placed with all, some, or none of their siblings did not differ significantly with the total case length. Children who were placed with "All" of their siblings had a mean number of days of 424.64 ($SD = 227.59$). Children who were placed with "Some" of their siblings had a mean number of days of 429.23 ($SD = 247.64$). Children who were placed with "None" of their siblings had a mean number of days of 365.17 ($SD = 232.68$).

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare sibling placement status and the length of out of home placement. There was a significant difference found between the length of out of home placement and sibling placement status ($F(2, 335)= 3.33, p < .05$). Tukey's HSD was used to determine the

nature of the differences between the sibling placement statuses. This analysis revealed that children who were placed with "All" of their siblings stayed longer in foster care placement ($M = 253.36$, $SD = 204.67$) than children who were placed with "None" of their siblings ($M = 186.64$, $SD = 188.55$). Children who were placed with "Some" of their siblings ($M = 227.71$, $SD = 225.51$) were not significantly different from either of the other two groups.

Two independent t-tests were calculated since it was observed that the mean scores for "All" and "Some" siblings were very similar. Instead of sibling placement status having 3 levels (All, Some, None), it became a 2 level variable. The two categories, "All" and "Some" were combined and compared to the "None" category; making a new variable with children placed with "All" or "Some" siblings combined. One independent t-test comparing the mean case length of children who were placed with "All" or "Some" siblings vs. children who were placed with "None" of their siblings found a significant difference between the means of the two groups ($t(336)=2.25$, $p < .05$). The mean case length of children who were placed with "All" or "Some" of their siblings was significantly longer ($M = 426.29$, $SD = 234.46$) than children were placed with "None" of their

siblings ($M = 365.17$, $SD = 232.68$). The second independent t-test comparing the mean out of home placement length of children who were placed with "All" or "Some" siblings vs. children who were placed with "None" of their siblings found a significant difference between the means of the two groups ($t(336) = 2.42$, $p < .05$). The mean out of placement length of children who were placed with "All" or "Some" siblings was significantly longer ($M = 244.12$, $SD = 212.27$) than children were placed with "None" of their siblings ($M = 186.64$, $SD = 188.55$).

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to compare sibling placement status and permanency outcome. A significant interaction was found ($\chi^2(2) = 6.67$, $p < .05$). Compared to what would be expected, children placed with "All" their siblings were less likely to have the permanency outcome of reunification. Children placed with "All" their siblings were more likely to have the permanency outcome of guardianship or adoption than expected. Next, compared to what would be expected, children placed with "Some" of their siblings were more likely to have the permanency outcome of reunification. Children placed with "Some" of their siblings were less likely to have the permanency outcome of guardianship or

adoption than expected. Lastly, compared to what would be expected, children placed with "None" of their siblings were more likely to have the permanency outcome of reunification. Children placed with "None" of their siblings were less likely to have the permanency outcome of guardianship or adoption than expected.

Summary

In this chapter, the sample and descriptive statistics were presented, along with the findings of the data analysis performed. Among the findings, it was presented that whether a child was placed with all, some, or none of their siblings, it did not differ significantly with the number of placements. Also, whether a child was placed with all, some, or none of their siblings did not differ significantly with the total case length. However, there was a significant difference found between the length of out of home placement and sibling placement status. There was a significant difference between children who were placed with "All" or "Some" siblings vs. "None" of their siblings and total case length. Also, there was a significant difference between children who were placed with "All" or "Some" siblings vs. "None" of their siblings

and total out of home placement length. Lastly, a significant interaction was found between sibling placement status and permanency outcome.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from this quantitative study of the effects of sibling placements on stability and permanency in foster care. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and recommendations for social work practice, policy and research.

Discussion

This study assessed the overall placement stability and permanency of children in joint or separate sibling placements. Within this sample, it was found that approximately 43% were placed with "All" their siblings, 24% were placed with "Some" of their siblings, and 33% were placed with "None" of their siblings. This observation was interpreted that while a majority of children were placed with their siblings in foster care, one in three were placed alone. This information was consistent with the findings of literature which have presented that about 42-46% of children who had siblings in care were placed with "All" of their siblings and 32% were not placed with any of their siblings (Lery et al., 2005; Shlonsky et al., 2003).

However, there was some difference between the percentages of children placed with some of their siblings (33%) in this study compared to what was found in the literature (66%) (Shlonsky et al., 2003). The observation here is that there still needs to be more effort to increase the practice of placing siblings together. It does appear that San Bernardino County is in compliance with federal and state standards, however, it is unknown from this data set why some children were separated from their siblings. It can only be assumed that some children were not placed with "All" or "Some" of their siblings because placement may not have been available to accommodate all siblings or may have been assessed as being detrimental to one or more siblings.

Within the sample, it was observed that the majority of the children had two or less placement changes while in the child welfare system. Overall, this was interpreted that the children in this sample had stable placements; however, no inferences can be made due to only being descriptive data of the sample's case characteristics. It was also observed that a majority of the sample were placed in a foster family agency certified home or relative home. In this study, it appeared that these two types of placements were more likely to have children who also had

siblings within the foster care system. Furthermore, the average out of home placement length was about 7 to 8 months and the average full case length was about 13 months. This observation can be partially explained by federal and state standards that mandate reunifying children with their family within the 12-month time frame. What greatly stood out was that a majority of the sample had the permanency outcome of reunification. This can most likely be explained by the criteria required for the sample to have been opened and closed between 2008 and 2010, which are most likely to be cases with the case closure reason of reunification due to short time-frame.

In this study, there was no significant difference found between number of placement changes and sibling placement status. The one-way ANOVA conducted indicated that whether a child was placed with all, some, or none of their siblings did not differ significantly with the number of placements. This finding could indicate that whether a child is placed with all, some, or none of their siblings, it does not affect their placement stability while living in out-of-home foster care. An average of the number of placement changes were less than two, indicating that most of the siblings within all categories of sibling placement

status had stable placements while in foster care. This finding was unexpected due to literature by Staff and Fein (1992) who found "that siblings placed together were more likely to remain in their first placements and less likely to experience placement disruption than siblings who were separated" (as cited in Smith, 1998, p.339). Findings also differ from literature from Thorpe and Swart (1992) who had "found that children separated from their siblings experienced a greater number of placements over time than siblings who remained together while in care" (as cited in Smith, 1998, p.339). Additionally, further literature by Hegar (2005) found "that efforts to maintain siblings together may result in more stable placements and better child well-being outcomes" (as cited in Shlonsky et al., 2005, p.693). However, this finding of the study may show lack of support to the literature due to the constricted sample of this study. The finding may have been affected by sampling time frame because shorter cases tend to have less of a chance to have placement disruptions.

In this study, there was no significant difference found between total case length and sibling placement status. The one-way ANOVA conducted indicated that whether a child was placed with all, some, or none of their

siblings did not differ significantly with the total case length. This finding could indicate that whether a child is placed with all, some, or none of their siblings, it does not affect their permanency status or how they exit the child welfare system. There may be no significant difference because of the constricted time-frame of 2008-2010 in which the sample was obtained from. The average case length was about 13 months; therefore, the children with siblings who are in the child welfare system longer are not represented in the sampling frame.

However, in this study, there was a significant difference found between sibling placement status and the length of out of home placement. The one-way ANOVA conducted indicated that children who were placed with "All" of their siblings stayed longer in out of home placement than children who were placed with "None" of their siblings. However, children who were placed with "Some" of their siblings were not significantly different from either of the other two groups. This finding could indicate that whether a child is placed with all, some, or none of their siblings, can affect their stability within the foster care system in regards to out of home placements. It can be indicated from this finding that

children who are placed with "All" of their siblings stay longer in out of home placements, meaning a more stable placement than children who placed with "None" of their siblings because it is assumed less disruption has occurred; otherwise, out of home placements would be shorter. This finding supports literature that suggest children placed with "All" siblings were as stable as or more stable than, placements of single children or separated siblings (Hegar, 2005).

This study found a significant relationship between the mean case lengths of children who were placed with "All/Some" vs. children who were placed with "None" of their siblings. The independent t-test performed indicated that children who were placed with at least one sibling have a longer case length than children placed alone. Another significant relationship was found between the mean out of home placement length of children who were placed with "All/Some" vs. children who were placed with "None" of their siblings. The independent t-test performed indicated that children who were placed with at least one sibling have a longer out of home placement length than children placed alone. Linking the finding that showed siblings sets who are placed together tend to go into guardianship rather

than reunify could contribute to this finding of the longer stay in foster care. This could have something to do with parents being less motivated to reunify if all siblings are together. It can also be an indicator that caregivers who take sibling sets are more committed to their long term care.

In this study, there was a significant interaction found comparing sibling placement status and permanency outcome. The chi-square test conducted presented that children placed with "All" of their siblings were less likely to have the permanency outcome of reunification and more likely to have the permanency outcome of guardianship or adoption than expected. This is the reason case length is longer for children placed with "All" siblings. Case length is extended when working towards guardianship and adoption. Furthermore, children placed with "Some" of their siblings were more likely to have the permanency outcome of reunification and less likely to have the permanency outcome of guardianship or adoption than expected. Lastly, children placed with "None" of their siblings were more likely to have the permanency outcome of reunification and less likely to have the permanency outcome of guardianship or adoption than expected. Separate sibling placement may

be leading to a higher rate of reunification because child welfare workers are making all efforts to reunify these children back to their families to continue to build healthy attachments. These findings indicate that contrary to literature findings about sibling placements and placement permanency, children placed with only "Some" or "None" of their siblings are likely to be reunified with their family than obtain guardianship or adoption. However, these findings between sibling placement status and permanency outcome are similar to literature from Leathers (2005) which findings suggested that children who were placed with siblings don't necessarily increase or decrease their chances that they will be reunified with their family and the positive association with joint sibling placement and adoption. This study's findings also indicate that children placed with "All" their siblings are less likely to be reunified with their parents than expected and more likely to have the permanency outcome of guardianship or adoption. Overall, in regards to federal and state standards, it should be continued to mandate child welfare workers to have siblings placed together and have preference for children in the child welfare system to reunify back with their family. There is a need for social

workers to support reunification goals when siblings are placed together.

Limitations

There were several limitations present in this study. The sample was constricted to cases which had to open and be closed between the years 2008 to 2010. The sample was also constricted to children with no more than 3 siblings between the ages of 4-13 years old. The data presented is only representative of the sample population that was used in this study and cannot be available as evidence for any final conclusions on the subject of sibling placement status, stability, and permanency. This study is not necessarily a representative of all children in joint or separate sibling placements within the San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services or another public child welfare agency.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

In regards to the recommendations for social work practice, policy and research, it's important that practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers in this field are well aware of the outcomes that different foster care

placement arrangements could have for children whose siblings are also in foster care. In this study, there was a significant interaction found comparing sibling placement status and permanency outcome and a significant difference found between the length of out of home placement and sibling placement status which revealed that children who were placed with "All" of their siblings stayed longer in foster care placement than children who were placed with "None" of their siblings. Therefore, child and family service agencies should continue to evaluate how they place sibling sets within foster care and continue to make an effort to keep them together to further increase stability and permanency of these children.

Future studies should consider expanding on this research by extending the time frame from which the sample of this study was collected from. This time frame of 2008 to 2010 limited the sample, especially with the specific criteria of the sample which had to include children between the ages of 4-13 and who had no more than 3 siblings. Future researchers who implement this can perhaps make the findings of this study more generalizable to children who have siblings in foster care.

Further research is also needed to address what social-emotional problems children are affected by who are separated from their siblings. This study only sought to provide the effects sibling placements had on the stability and permanency of children in foster care.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to assess overall placement stability and permanency in joint or separate sibling placements within the San Bernardino Department of Children and Family Services. This study was a quantitative study which involved the collections of secondary data of sibling placements from the agency. Multiple one-way ANOVAs were conducted when looking at the relationships between sibling placement status and stability. A chi-square test was run when looking at the relationship between sibling placement status and permanency. Significant findings included a significant interaction found comparing sibling placement status and permanency outcome which indicated that children placed with "All" their siblings were more likely to be adopted than children placed with "Some" or "None" of their siblings. Also, a significant difference was found between the length of out of home placement and

sibling placement status which revealed that children who were placed with "All" of their siblings stayed longer in placements than children who were placed with "None" of their siblings. Furthermore, the t-tests conducted showed significant difference between children who were placed with "All/Some" vs. "None" of their siblings and total case length. Also, there was a significant difference between children who were placed with "All/Some" vs. "None" of their siblings and total out of home placement length. The significance of these results presents the importance of placing siblings together in foster care when removed from their parents for these children to have a better chance at stability and permanency in and out of foster care.

APPENDIX A
DATA EXTRACTION FORM

Data Extraction Form

Demographics

Gender

1. Male 2. Female

Age (must be between 4-13 years)

Ethnicity

1. White
2. African American
3. Asian/Pacific Islander
4. Hispanic
5. Native American
6. Other

Date entered and exited system: (Case must have been opened and closed between 2008-2010)

Length (days) in out of home placement.

Sibling Placement Status

Total Number of siblings

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3

Placement with sibling(s)—

1. All
2. Some
3. None

Stability

Number of Placement changes

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 or more

Permanency Outcomes

1. Reunification
2. Guardianship
3. Adoption

Created by Andrea Lomeli

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