



The Relationship Between Foster Parent Knowledge of Child Development and the Enrollment of their Foster Children in Early Childhood Education Programs



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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education programs are known to enhance children's development and to promote overall wellbeing; however, the enrollment of foster children is significantly low. Children under the age of five make up the greatest percentage of children in the child welfare system, and every year, this population continues to grow. The present study was a secondary data analysis from Children at Risk in the Child Welfare System: Collaborations to Promote School Readiness (Ward, Yoon, & Oldham 2013). Based on the answers obtained from a quantitative survey, a binary logistic regression was used to examine how the source and the confidence of knowledge foster parents have regarding child development, affected whether the foster parents enrolled their foster children in early childhood education programs. Additionally, the covariates included in the model were the foster parents' total annual income and the highest level of education for each foster parent. The results demonstrated that the regression model predicting foster children's enrollment was not statistically significant. Overall, further research is needed to focus on the early education of foster children due to limited scholarship and the importance it has for the field of social work.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study

- According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2019), in the 2017-2018 school year, 34,148 foster children were enrolled in early childhood education programs, which only makes up 3.3% of their total population.

Purpose of the Research

- To examine the relationship between knowledge of child development and enrollment into early childhood education programs

Research Questions

- What is the relationship between confidence in knowledge about child development and enrolling a foster child in early childhood education programs?
- What is the relationship between the source of knowledge (i.e., having own children, classes, social worker) on child development and having enrolled a foster child in early childhood education programs?

Hypotheses

- It is hypothesized that the foster parents who are more confident in child development information are more likely to enroll their foster children in early childhood education programs.
- It is also hypothesized that the relationship between the source of information about child development and enrolling foster children in early childhood education will differ based on the source of information.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Benefits of Early Childhood Education Programs for Foster Children

- There are five areas where the benefits of early childhood education can be seen: (1) social skills, (2) early interventions for developmentally delayed children, (3) school readiness and school attainment, (4) developmental stimulation and (5) overall stability and structure (Klein et al., 2018).

Benefits of Early Childhood Education Programs for Foster Parents

- Childcare assistance (such as early education programs) was directly related to reducing the likelihood of placement disruption for foster children (Meloy, & Phillips, 2012).

Gaps and Limitations

- Previous scholarship has focused on the outcomes for foster children receiving early childhood education services and not on the foster parents' prior knowledge of these services.
- Further research is needed to investigate the disconnect between foster parents and their willingness to enroll their foster children into educational services.
- The limited studies that address foster children in early education, have small sample sizes, thus limiting the generalizability of the studies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

- The current cross-sectional study used secondary data analysis from the *Children at Risk in the Child Welfare System: Collaborations to Promote School Readiness* (2013) which focused on children in the Colorado area who were involved with the child welfare system from the ages of zero to five.
- Two quantitative surveys were distributed to foster parents (n=266) and to child welfare caseworkers (n=339). Qualitative data was also drawn by conducting field study interviews with the foster parents, biological parents, and professionals who have children in their care under the age of five. The current research study focused on the foster parent quantitative data.

Data Collection

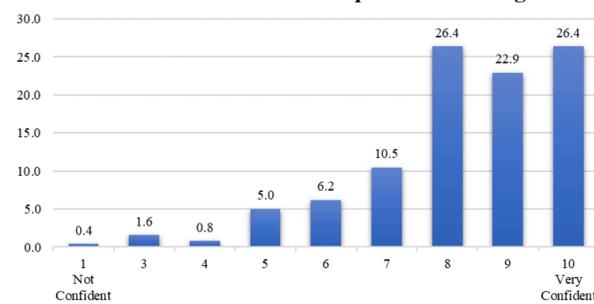
- With the assistance of with the Child Welfare Division of the Colorado Department of Human Services various letters and emails were sent to foster care administrators to invite them to participate in the study. Additionally, private foster care agencies were also contacted and invited to study.
- There was a total of 37 counties (total of 707 foster families) who received the Foster Parent Surveys.
- The questionnaire was administered as an online questionnaire or as a mail paper copy—based on the preference of each participant.

Sample

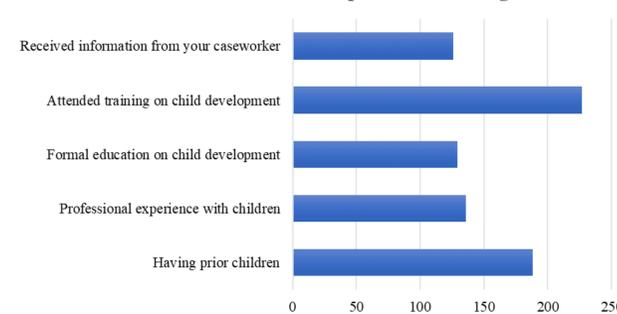
- After adjusting for non-respondents, the sample size was accounted for 266 participants who were foster parents that have or had fostered children under the age of five in the last 12 months.
- The sample of the participants were composed from 34 different counties within the state of Colorado.
- A convenience non-probability sampling method was utilized which had a 38 percent response rate from the Foster Parent Survey.
- The respondents who did not answer all questions pertaining to the knowledge of child development and the confidence of their knowledge on child development and the enrollment their foster children into early childhood education programs, were excluded from the current study.

Measures

Confidence of child development knowledge



Source of child development knowledge



Knowledge of Child Development

- The confidence of child development knowledge was measured using a 10-point Likert Scale with responses ranging from 1 (Not Confident) to 10 (Very Confident).

Enrollment

- The enrollment of foster children was measured using a dichotomous question which asked foster parents if they had ever enrolled their foster children in daycare, preschool, or Headstart programs.

RESULTS

Binary Logistic Regression

- The results showed that the regression model predicting foster children enrollment was *not statistically significant* ($X^2 = 8.257$, $df = 9$, $p > 0.05$ with Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.056$). The independent variables, confidence of child development knowledge and source of child development knowledge, did not significantly predict the likelihood of foster parents to enroll foster children into early childhood education.

Contributing Factors	B	SE	Significance	Odds Ratio
Confidence of child development knowledge	-0.03	0.10	0.79	0.97
Source of child development knowledge				
Having children of your own	-0.40	0.36	0.27	0.67
Professional experience with children	0.25	0.36	0.49	1.29
Formal education on child development	-0.03	0.36	0.93	0.97
Attended training on child development	0.42	0.43	0.33	1.52
Information provided by caseworker	0.45	0.31	0.15	1.56
Foster family's total annual income	-0.03	0.08	0.70	0.10
Highest level of education completed				
Foster Parent 1	0.23	0.17	0.18	1.26
Foster Parent 2	-0.19	0.16	0.23	0.82
Constant	0.25	1.01	0.80	1.29

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

- The inferential analysis yielded an insignificant relationship between the foster parents' knowledge on child development and the enrollment of their foster children into early education programs.
- The logistical regression analysis contradicted previous scholarship that highlighted the benefits of early childhood education programs for both foster parents and foster children.

Implications for Research and Practice

- The present research findings demonstrated a high need for research regarding enrollment and access to early education programs for foster children.
- Further research needs to be done regarding the knowledge foster parents have on early childhood education programs and the barriers that foster parents face when trying to access early education services.

Limitations

- While there were many essential questions that could have provided valuable insight regarding the enrollment of early childhood education programs among foster parents, the questions could not be utilized due to the insufficient data.
- The present study had a lack of racial/ethnic diversity within the sample population.
- The present study had a small sample size contributed to the lack of representativeness and generalizability of the population.

Strengths

- The current study contributes to the field of social work by highlighting the needs of foster children and foster parents.
- The current study had an exhaustive analysis regarding the importance of early childhood education programs and overall child development.
- Lastly, the study highlights how valuable early childhood education can be for vulnerable populations such as foster youth.

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¡Lo hicimos!

