Kinship Care: Strengths and Challenges

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Origins of Kinship Care

- Informal adoption—extended families rearing kin outside the child welfare system
- Most agencies targeted nonrelatives as foster parents and screened out kin
- Fewer nonrelatives as foster parents
- 1979 Supreme Court decree
- Advent of HIV/AIDS in 1980s
- Advent of crack cocaine in 1980s
Kinship Care

• The term “kinship care” was coined in the 1980s.
• “Kinship care” refers to children who are raised by kin caregivers in and outside of foster care.
• One million Black children are in kinship care.
Kinship Care: Informal vs. Formal

Informal: Kin children not in foster care
- 85% of all Black children reared by kin
- Older children (6 years and older)
- Caregivers are less educated

Formal: Kin children in foster care
- 15% of all Black children reared by kin
- Younger children (under 6 years old)
- Caregivers are more educated
## Trends in Formal Kinship Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected States</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total U.S.</strong></td>
<td><strong>26%</strong></td>
<td><strong>22%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Race/Ethnicity by Formal Kinship Care, 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>% in Kinship Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Children</strong></td>
<td><strong>22%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cultural Insensitivity: Myths About Kin Caregivers

- The apple does not fall far from the tree.
- Kin caregivers only do it for the money.
- Kin are too old/poor to care for children.
- Kin care is not as permanent as adoption.
- Kin placements are not as safe for children as adoption.
Advantages of Kinship Care Over Nonkin Foster Care

- Less child trauma
- More contact with birth parents
- More contact with siblings
- Maintain family history and culture
- Greater placement stability
- Fewer children with disabilities
- Lower re-abuse rates with kin
Advantages of Nonkin Foster Care Over Kinship Care

- Younger caregivers
- Higher educated
- Higher income
- More services
- Less time in care
Deficient Comparisons

- A caveat of caution should be added when comparing kin families of lower SES and fewer services with nonkin families of higher SES and more services.
- Poorer outcomes are expected of lower income than of higher income families.
- Kin and nonkin families of same income and services might lead to similar outcomes (e.g., lengths of stay in care).
Various Roles of Kin Families

- Maintaining family preservation
- Prevention and diversion from foster care
- Facilitating parental reunification
- Emergency/temporary child care
- Initial child placement setting
- Subsequent child placement setting
- Resource on discharge of child/youth
- Support from paternal extended families
Future Research Questions

What are child outcomes...

- ... when kin and nonkin families have similar income and services?
- ... when kin are used as first placements?
- ... when vital services and support are also provided to informal kin caregivers outside the child welfare system?
- ... when more equitable licensing standards are provided for kinship care families?