Research Topic & Question

Research Topic
I want to examine how foster care parents view the foster care system. We can then determine if foster parents who have a negative view of the foster system treat the foster children in their care negatively as a result.

Research Questions
Do foster parents view the foster care system negatively, and, if so, do they treat foster children in their care negatively?

Literature Review
Examining the relationship between foster parents and the foster care system can be beneficial because it helps us ensure that foster children are not being cared for by frustrated guardians. The majority of research done on the foster care system in general has focused more on the children and how they adapt. There is some literature, however, written from the perspective of foster parents and how they adapt. Rosenwald and Bronstein (2008) studied the characteristics foster parents prefer in foster children and foster parents’ experiences. They collected data by interviewing focus groups. The focus groups discussed topics like preferred characteristics in foster children, foster parents feeling mistrusted or undervalued, relationships between caseworkers and foster parents, and perceived problems within the foster care system. This research is valuable because it is done from the perspective of the foster parents and acknowledges that foster parents have a greater effect on the success of the system than agencies realize.

The foster parents’ role is crucial, and, if they view the system negatively, it is likely that they will not be as successful as if they viewed it positively. Rosenwald and Bronstein’s (2008) research is pertinent to this study because of the testimonies of foster parents who feel mistrusted and undervalued by agencies, who are disconnected from the caseworkers, and who perceive problems within the foster system. Participants in this study reported being in need of support from other foster parents in order not to get discouraged (Rosenwald & Bronstein, 2008). The data collected from this study suggests that foster parents do have a negative attitude towards agencies and that it does affect the quality of care children receive.

Cooley and Petren (2011) also wanted to measure the quality of care children were receiving; however, they used a different strategy to conduct the research. They used questionnaires that allowed foster parents to rate themselves in terms of competency. Cooley and Petren (2011) concluded that the foster parents and the agencies differed in the opinions about competency. The foster parents are very dissatisfied with the training agencies provide. Foster parents voiced their concerns and frustrations about the insufficient training because they feel they are unprepared and not confident enough with the role of foster parent to do an effective job. Just as frustrated foster parents will not be as successful as they could be, neither will parents who are insecure about their ability to perform their role. Results from this research support the idea that foster parents are more likely to do a poor job if they have a negative view of the system or agencies that they interact with.

Hudson and Levasseur (2002) realized the importance of foster parents feeling respected and recognized. Their research consisted of foster parents answering questionnaires about what their needs as foster parents were in order to feel supported enough to maintain their caring role. Foster parents reported frustrations when it came to communicating with the agencies, feeling like their work was not respected or recognized, and that the needs of their foster children were not being met. The literature on this study supports the concept that frustrated foster parents will be less effective than they could be.

Foster children are already more susceptible than other children to problems. They need attentive foster parents who are not frustrated, who feel valued by agencies so they have a good relationship with case workers and can solve problems together, and who receive training so they feel confident in caring for the children (Rosenwald & Bronstein 2008). Foster parents who have an overall positive view of the foster care system and the agencies they interact with are more likely to treat their children with more patience and not consider withdrawing from the foster system.

Methodology

For this research I will be using a questionnaire. The articles I read in my literature review all used non-random samples. I will propose to draw a random sample of foster parents. By choosing foster parents randomly, my sample should contain foster parents who represent a wide range of years of experience as a foster parent, as well as a wide range of numbers of children in their care. The majority of previous researchers selected foster parents for their studies through agencies. I would like to use the client list of different agencies across America and send the same questionnaires to the foster parents to fill out. I propose to pull a list of agencies in each state randomly, and then choose the agencies to call upon from each state. I would then use their client list to randomly select the foster parents to whom the questionnaire surveys would be sent. The random sample will represent the broad geographical diversity of the United States.

Questions on the survey will deal with the themes I found in the research I reviewed, covering topics such as how foster parents thought the system did in terms of training them, how they feel they were viewed by the system in terms of worth, the relationship they had with the workers with whom they interacted regularly, and how they got needed support from other parents.

Bibliography


http://www.mckinleycc.org/Programs/Foster-Care-Adoptions/Refer-a-Foster-Parent.aspx