Adoption Outcomes for Maltreated Infants: A Longitudinal Analysis

Ted Cross

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Maltreated Infants Are an Important Population to Track

• Report to CPS for infants can signal serious abuse or neglect

• Infants at greatest risk of entry into foster care (approximately 1% risk; Wulczyn, Hislop & Harden, 2002)

• Early disruptions in care could seriously affect attachment and well-being

• Infants tend to stay in foster care longer than other children (Wulczyn, Hislop & Harden, 2002)
“In fiscal year (FY) 2001, nearly 39,000 infants under the age of one entered foster care, where they may lack the stability that promotes attachment and early brain development.” (p. 9)
Adoption is an important outcome for many maltreated infants

• Many maltreated infants may need adoptive homes
• Adoption may be more likely for infants than for older children
• But we have little data on pathways to and long-term outcomes of adoption
Research Questions

• How frequently are infants involved in CPS investigations placed out of the home?
• How frequently are they adopted?
• How many placements do they have before being adopted?
• How long does adoption take?
• How well are maltreated infants who are adopted doing?
National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW)

- Longitudinal national probability study of children involved with child welfare services (CWS)
- Interviews with children, caregivers, and teachers as well as caseworkers
- Data on CWS actions, service delivery, and child well-being and development
- Random samples:
  - 92 primary sampling units (counties) across the country
  - 5501 children involved in investigations
• Baseline data collection took place in 1999-2000
• Data were collected approximately 4 months following the close of the maltreatment investigation
5 Year Follow-Up on Infants

- Wave 5 follow-up conducted from 9/05 to 7/06, approximately 5 years following close of investigation
- First component was data collection on 1,196 children age 0-1 at the time of sampling
- Only 12% are still open cases with CWS, but many have been affected by their involvement with CWS
Characteristics of Infants at Baseline

Most were reported because of neglect

About half were children of color
Over 30% were out of home soon after the close of the investigation.
Adoptive home was the second most common setting after five years.
Adoption was fairly common among children who were removed.
27.2% of maltreated infants who were later adopted lived in 3 or more settings.
66% of adopted children were in adoptive homes by their first birthday.

Median time from adoptive placement to finalization = 17 months.

87% to 89% of adoptions finalized by 5 year follow-up.

Most infants were in adoptive homes by age 1 but finalization could take time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-12 months</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-24 months</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-36 months</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 36 months</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not yet finalized</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question:

How well are adopted infants doing at a five year follow-up?
Four groups were compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting at 5 Year Follow-Up</th>
<th>N</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children with <strong>Adoptive Parents</strong> (both unrelated and kin adoptive parents)</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children living with <strong>Biological Parents</strong> (both never placed and reunified)</td>
<td>494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in <strong>Permanent Kin Care</strong> and other permanent settings</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in <strong>Foster Care</strong> and other out-of-home</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No Mental Health or Behavioral Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Health and Behavioral Measure</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child total behavior problems (caregiver rating)</td>
<td>No significant differences between adoptive, biological, kin and foster care groups at 5 year follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child total behavior problems (teacher rating)</td>
<td>No significant differences between adoptive, biological, kin and foster care groups at 5 year follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention problems (teacher rating)</td>
<td>No significant differences between adoptive, biological, kin and foster care groups at 5 year follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive aggression</td>
<td>No significant differences between adoptive, biological, kin and foster care groups at 5 year follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactive aggression</td>
<td>No significant differences between adoptive, biological, kin and foster care groups at 5 year follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social competence (teacher rating)</td>
<td>No significant differences between adoptive, biological, kin and foster care groups at 5 year follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social competence (parent ratings)</td>
<td>No significant differences between adoptive, biological, kin and foster care groups at 5 year follow-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Percentages of Children in Clinical Range

(>64) on CBCL Behavior Problem Score by Setting

- Normative
- Adoptive
- Bio
- Kin and Other In-Home
- Foster Care and Other Out-of-Home
Cognitive and Learning Skills by Setting

- Children in adoptive homes did not differ significantly from children with biological parents on most measures.
- Children in adoptive homes had significantly higher scores than children in kin and/or foster care on a number of measures.
- Sample children were significantly below the norm on several measures.
No Significant Difference from Children with Biological Caregivers on Most Cognitive and Learning Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive and Learning Skill</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied Problems</td>
<td>Adopted = Biological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage Comprehension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Intellectual Functioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Adopted Children Scored Higher on Several Cognitive and Learning Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive and Learning Skill</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter-Word Identification</td>
<td>Adopted &gt; Bio, Kin, Foster Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage Comprehension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Problem Solving</td>
<td>Adopted &gt; Kin, Foster Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Adopted &gt; Kin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Intellectual Functioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Development</td>
<td>Adopted &gt; Foster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td></td>
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Comparison of 5 Year Means

Woodcock Johnson Passage Comprehension Scale

- Normative
- Adoptive
- Bio
- Kin and Other In-Home
- Foster Care and Other Out-of-Home
Comparison of 5 Year Means

Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test – Vocabulary Score by Child Setting

Children and Family Research Center
Preschool Language Scale Results Over Time

• Only NSCAW measure that is used across four waves for infant sample
• Adopted children tended to have significantly lower language scores at baseline than other groups but higher rate of growth than other groups
• “Catching up” or regression to the mean?
Mean Raw Score on the Expressive Communication Score Over Time

Setting at the 5 year follow-up

Baseline 1 1/2 years 3 years 5 years

Normative
Adopted
Biological parents
Kinship
Foster care
### Growth Curve Analysis Results

**Expressive Communication Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intercept (Baseline Mean)</th>
<th>Slope (Change Between Waves)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological parents</td>
<td>5.6 (0.4)</td>
<td>11.9 (0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoptive parents</td>
<td>2.8 (0.4)</td>
<td>14.3 (0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinship caregivers</td>
<td>3.7 (0.5)</td>
<td>12.7 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster caregivers &amp;</td>
<td>4.1 (0.8)</td>
<td>12.2 (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other out-of-home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

- Over 30% of infants involved in child maltreatment investigations were out of home soon after the close of the investigation.
- 15% of infants involved in child maltreatment investigations were adopted within five years; 36% of those who were out-of-home.
• 27.2% of maltreated infants who were later adopted lived in 3 or more settings

• 2/3 of adopted infants were in adoptive homes by age 1 but the median time to finalization was 17 months
• At five-year follow-up, adopted children did not differ from other children in this population on mental health and behavior problems (except children in foster care)

• Children in permanent homes at five-year follow-up had same rate of emotional and behavioral problems as children in general

• At five-year follow-up, adopted children had higher scores on numerous cognitive and learning tests than children in kin care and foster care
• Children who were later adopted had lower language scores than other children at baseline, but experienced significantly greater growth and ended with equal or higher language scores.
Conclusion

- Adoption is relatively frequent for infants in child maltreatment investigations
- Adoptive children and families face stresses along the way (multiple settings, time to finalization)
- Most adopted infants do well and show better cognitive and learning skills than children in kinship and foster care after five years
- Results could inform policy on foster care, kinship care and adoption
Appendix:
Additional Results
Child Physical Health by Setting

• Caregivers in adoptive group and every other group rated over 90% of children as “good, very good or excellent health”

• Children in adoptive settings were significantly more likely to be identified by caregivers as having serious chronic health problems
Percentage of Children with a Serious Chronic Health Condition¹ by Setting

¹ Measured at 5 year follow-up
Possible Explanations

• Children with chronic health care needs may receive priority for adoptive placements

• Adoptive parents may identify health conditions more readily

• Differences in health care may lead to increased probability of identifying chronic conditions