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Abstract

This literature review explored psychological problems (externalizing and internalizing behaviors) of foster children. Substance abuse risks, behavior problems, depression, and anxiety were specifically covered. Additionally, foster children's relationships with parents (via attachment) and peers were investigated. The future directions and implications of the research will also be provided.

Psychological Problems

- Children in foster care are more susceptible to face psychological problems (Stoner et al., 2015; Tordon et al., 2019; Woods et al., 2011)
- Foster children typically have less desirable mental health outcomes than the overall populace (Lee & Fusco, 2021; Stoner et al., 2015)

Externalizing Behaviors

Substance Abuse Risks

- Compared to their peers, kids in foster care abuse substances (e.g., drugs, tobacco, and alcohol) at vastly larger rates (Siegel et al., 2016; Sphiegel et al., 2016).
- Lifelong occurrence rates for alcohol and substances besides marijuana were greater across former foster young adults than among young people who had never been in foster care (Greeno et al., 2019).

Behavioral Problems

- Foster children have greater degrees of behavioral challenges than their peers in the community (Clausen et al., 2012; Perry & Price, 2017; Rus et al., 2014; Salas et al., 2016).
- Foster care has an unfavorable bearing on the development of adolescent behavioral disturbances (Clausen et al., 2012; Perry & Price, 2017; Rus et al., 2014; Salas et al., 2016)

Internalizing Behaviors

Depression

- Major depressive disorder and mania had a greater prevalence in fostered children than non-fostered children (Tordon et al., 2019; Woods et al., 2011).
- Depressive symptoms attributed to substantial disparities in the perceived quality of life of foster children (Seiler et al., 2015).

Anxiety

- A history of foster care placement was also strongly linked to a higher degree of anxiety (Lee & Fusco, 2015), and a higher prevalence of PTSD (Tordon et al., 2019; Woods et al., 2011).
- Adolescents in foster care had greater degrees of internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety) and scored considerably higher on the anxiety total scale than the majority of symptom categories (Moussavi et al., 2020; Moussavi et al., 2021).

Relationships

Attachment

- Children who have been abused in the past were less likely to display secure attachments in their relationships, and more likely to develop insecure attachment (Suzuki and Tomada, 2015).
- Foster children had substantially higher degrees of avoidant attachment than children in biological homes (Jankowska et al., 2015).
- Attachment security was stronger among foster children who live with younger foster parents compared with foster children living with older foster parents (Gabler et al., 2014).

Peers

- Quality of peer relationships among foster children is consistently poorer than the general population (Almas et al., 2015; Goemans et al., 2018; Salas et al., 2016).
- Assessments of foster children's conduct in classroom settings and on the playground revealed that they were less involved with their classmates (Almas et al., 2015).

Implications

- Because it has been shown that group therapy encourages children to address their emotional health (Villagrana, 2017), providing services for foster children to seek assistance for their traumas and internalizing behaviors may enhance their mental health.
- Preventative substance abuse programs should be established in foster care settings. Children may then have the ability to learn about the consequences of short- and long-term drug usage on their bodies and mental health.
- Researchers should seek to implement wellness workshops where the children can gain knowledge on how to take proper care of themselves, including their mental health, and how to be better equipped for life after foster care.

Future Directions

- Further studies on the social and mental development of children post foster care would be beneficial.
- There is a need for more research into the effects of foster children's relationships with their parents and caregivers. Researchers must conduct a more thorough examination of the adverse effects of foster care on children of various ages and ethnicities.
- The effects of parent and peer relationships on foster children should be explored deeper. Thus helping healthcare experts, caregivers, and society comprehend how foster care can affect children.