

The psychological wellbeing of parents and foster carers:

The role of self-efficacy and challenging behaviours

Emily McCaffery BPsych (Hons)

This research report is submitted to the

School of Psychology, The University of Newcastle

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Clinical Psychology

Date of submission: April 2013

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Structured Abstract	5
Critical Literature Review	
Foster Care in Australia	8
Self-Efficacy	11
Parenting Self-Efficacy as Addressed by Parent Training Programs	18
Foster Carer Self-Efficacy	21
Current Study	24
Manuscript	
Abstract.....	27
Introduction	28
Method	33
Results	38
Table 1. Demographic characteristics of parents and foster carers	38
Figure 1. Sources of support.....	40
Figure 2. Number of households containing one or more children with a formal mental health diagnosis	41
Table 2. Mean and standard deviation for outcome variables	42
Table 3. Correlation analysis	43
Table 4. Regression tables a, b and c	44
Figure 3. Preacher and Hayes mediation model.....	47
Figure 4. Mediation model: Parent distress.....	47
Figure 5. Mediation model: Anxiety.....	47

Figure 6. Mediation model: Depression	47
Discussion	48
References	54
Appendices:	
Appendix 1. Children and Youth Services Review Journal Scope and Notes for Contributors	62
Appendix 2. Foster carer online survey	74
Appendix 3. Parent online survey	89
Appendix 4. Rationale for measures selected	103

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Dr Linda Campbell and Dr Juanita Todd who were responsible for the supervision of this project. Thank you for your support and guidance. I would also like to thank Lee Averell for his assistance in the statistical analysis of this project. I would like to acknowledge the following services for their participation and support: Allambi Youth Services, Catholic Care, Life Without Barriers, Lifestyle Solutions, Connecting Carers NSW, The NSW Foster Care Association and The Foster Care Association of Victoria.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends, in particular my fiancé, for their patience and support during the completion of this project.

Structured Abstract

Background

The past decade has shown a steady increase in the disparity between the number of children in foster care, which has increased significantly, and the number of foster carers providing care. Retention rates of foster carers are low, with most carers only fostering for between 6 months and 15 years. One of the key factors influencing retention rates is stress resulting from caring for children with challenging behaviours and emotional difficulties. It has been suggested that parenting self-efficacy improves emotional wellbeing and parenting practices in parents and also enhances developmental outcomes for children. While limited research has been conducted regarding self-efficacy in foster carers, recent research proposes a positive relationship between self-efficacy and foster carer psychological wellbeing. To date, no research has compared stress levels, psychological wellbeing or self-efficacy between foster carers and parents. Such a comparison would contribute to our understanding of the unique experience of foster carers and of how to best support them in this challenging role.

Objectives

The primary aim of this study was to compare levels of self-efficacy, parenting stress and psychological wellbeing in foster carers and regular parents. Additionally, this study explored the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between psychological wellbeing and challenging behaviours in both foster carers and parents.

Methodology

All registered foster carers with one or more children currently in their care, and parents currently caring for a child under the age of 18, were eligible to participate. A total of 68 parents and 68 foster carers were recruited from local foster care agencies

and foster care support groups in New South Wales and Victoria, in addition to parent support groups, social networking, community health centres and the University of Newcastle. Participants completed an online survey consisting of the Parenting Stress Index (PSI-4), the Parenting Sense of Competency scale (PSOC), the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21), a measure of challenging behaviour and demographic information. Statistical analyses included an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) exploring between group differences and hierarchical multiple regressions investigating the influence of self-efficacy and challenging behaviours on the respondent's psychological wellbeing. A mediation analysis was also completed exploring the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between psychological wellbeing and challenging behaviours.

Results

Foster carers reported higher levels of mental health diagnoses in the children in their care, as compared to the parent group. No significant between-group differences were identified on the depression, anxiety, self-efficacy or parent distress scales, however foster carers did report significantly higher levels of challenging behaviours than those in the parent group. A lack of variance between the foster carer and parent groups resulted in the remaining analysis being conducted with the group as a whole. When examined as one group, hierarchical multiple regressions demonstrated that challenging behaviour accounted for 15.7% (parent distress), 6.1% (anxiety) and 8.4% (depression) of variance in each outcome variable. Each model improved significantly once self-efficacy was included, and explained an additional 5.2%, 2.4% and 6.8% of variance in parent distress, anxiety and depression respectively. The results of the

bootstrapping technique confirmed the partial mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between challenging behaviour and parental distress, and depression.

Conclusions

These results supported the initial hypothesis in that higher levels of challenging behaviour displayed by children were reported by foster carers. However no significant differences were observed between groups in levels of depression, anxiety, parent distress or self-efficacy. The results also support past research (Morgan & Baron, 2011) identifying self-efficacy as a partial mediator in the relationship between challenging behaviours and psychological wellbeing (specifically parental distress and depression).

Implications

This information contributes to current research about parenting self-efficacy in foster carers, and in the understanding of differing parenting experiences between foster carers and parents. Such information may assist in improving support and training for foster carers, and subsequently improve retention rates of foster carers.