Permanence as a Key Outcome in Core-Logic Model

Definition of Permanence

**National CASA Association:**

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\text{National CASA defines permanence for every abused and neglected child as being able to thrive in a permanent, safe and nurturing home.}
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**Child Trends:**

Child Trends adopts the Children’s Bureau’s definition for permanence—“achieving a ... family for every child” in foster care that is stable, permanent, and is bound together legally, with common goals and “a common future” (Delale-O’Connor and Williams, 2015).

**Child Welfare Information Gateway:**

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, the concept of *permanence* in the United States “can be characterized by a continuous thematic shift between family preservation and child safety” (Child’s Bureau, 2016). Efforts to reduce the time a child spent in foster care were geared up in the 1970’s, and culminated in the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA).

**Office of Juvenile Justice Prevention:**

“What is the goal? Permanency.” Legal Permanency “means that a permanent and secure legal relationship has been established between the adult caregiver and the child. Permanency is achieved when children are reunited with their families without further court supervision, are adopted or are placed with permanent Guardians” (Flargo and Kauder, 2009).
Key Outcome Literature

Permanence is comprised of Legal Permanence, Physical Permanence and Social Permanence.

Legal Permanence

It is a legally recognized, binding and enforceable relationship between a child and his or her caretaker. It is associated with legal permanency goals which include reunification, adoption and legal guardianship. These goals are intended to provide stability within a legal context for defined future and common goals.

In 1988, the US Department of Health and Human Services commissioned a study to examine the outcome of each of the five extant approaches in representation of children in the child welfare system: “law school clinics, staff attorneys, paid private attorneys, a paid private attorney teamed with lay volunteers (GAL), and unassisted lay volunteers (CASAs)” (Delale-O’Connor & Williams, 2015). They found that the outcome from the CASA/GAL model was more likely to achieve reunification when compared to the other models. In contrast, Calber Associates (2004) found that having a CASA/GAL volunteer was associated with increased time in out-of-home care. This finding bears further study with increased evidence-based rigor.

Physical Permanence:

Physical permanence relates to the location of the child after he or she exists foster care, and it pertains to continuing care for children through reunification with biological parents, placement under guardianship or through adoption. In regards to adoption, scholars continue to debate the effectiveness of the CASA intervention on this outcome for children in foster care. Poertner and Press (1990), and Litzelfelner (2000) were not able to establish a statistically significant association between the CASA intervention and the outcome of adoption (Pilkay & Lee, 2015).

However, the outcomes for physical permanence are also determined by the geographic location of the child, specifically if they lived in a rural or urban setting. Pilkay and Lee (2015) acknowledge that the data is inconclusive on outcomes for children in care in rural areas, but that geographic location plays a significant role in the permanency outcomes for children in urban areas due to the different rules, practices and exposure to adoption agencies and families seeking to adopt (Becker, Jordan & Larsen, 2007 in Pilkay & Lee, 2015).

Social Permanence

Social permanence refers to preserving and investing in social capital. The Adoption and Safe Families Act and Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption that Congress passed in 1997 and 2008 respectively, both promote permanence for youth in foster care as an alternative to aging out of the system. They
advocate for offering foster youth the opportunity to experience positive outcomes in education, relationships, health and life prospects. Bowlby (1977) and Bartholomew (1990) advocate for social permanence as a means to develop healthy relationship attachments in the future. Lawson and Berrick (2013) support the CASA model for providing foster children the opportunity to “form meaningful relationships” (Pilkay & Lee, [2015]. P. 2).

Proponents of permanence such as Reilly (2003) and D’Andrade and Berrick (2006), warn that leaving children for extended periods in foster care has negative outcomes in self-worth, health, education, how children relate to the world as well as higher rates of delinquency and encounters with the legal system (Pilkay & Lee, 2015). Pecora et.al. (2006) stated that delinquency increases when the level of care decreases, presenting an inverse relationship between delinquency and the level of care the youth receives. The authors stress the importance of “healthy, stable, permanent relationships” (Avery, 2010 in Pilkay & Lee, 2015) in order to achieve success in navigating the system.

Samanchin, Jones and LaLiberte (2013) used the Youth Connection Scale (YCS) to measure the level of relational permanence, which has three aspects: social connectedness of youth; establishing a safety net for the youth; and a sense of belonging. Brown, Leveille, & Gough (2006) define relational permanence “as youth experiencing a sense of belonging through enduring, life-long connections to parents, extended family or other caring adults, including at least one adult who will provide a permanent, parent-like connection for that youth” (ibid. P. 509).

Recommendation:

National CASA defines permanence for every abused and neglected child as being able to thrive in a stable, safe and nurturing home. The Performance Measurement Committee recommends adding “by achieving legal, physical and social permanence” to this definition.

General Resources:


Sciamanna (2013) Reunification of Foster Children With Their Families: The First Permanency Outcome, Policy Advocacy and Reform Center


Performance Measurement Resources:

A summary of the literature on Legal Permanency

The literature converges on improving the outcomes for children in foster care by establishing permanency. The “Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997” (ASFA) promotes adoption as a preferred public intervention for the child in the event reunification was not an option. Tefre (2015) reveals that ASFA is based on three pillars: risk-oriented pragmatism; parent responsibility for rehabilitation; and the child’s safety and permanence. ASFA was a big leap toward establishing permanence for children. But scholars and stakeholders are skeptical of an improved outcome for the children, unless the system, which Atwood (2011) compared to a trapdoor, changes.

There are ongoing attempts by scholars to understand the underlying forces and mechanisms in order to propose solutions. Akin (2011) identifies three major categories that predict legal permanency outcomes for children in foster care: (1) demographics; (2) clinical or mental status; and (3) kin relations and number of placements. The Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts implemented the Cold Case Project (CCP), which uses a statistical model that predicts which children would age out of foster care. Barclay, et al.
(2015) described the outcomes of this initiative as having a positive outcome by increasing the number of children with legal permanence.

Other models promote citizens’ involvement especially federally mandated programs such as the Court Appointed Special Advocates, and Citizen Review Panels to support positive change in the public child welfare agencies (Collins-Camargo, et al., 2009). Berrick, Cohen and Anthony (2011) are promoting the Parent Partner program which engages family and community in program planning for parents seeking reunification with their children. The innovation in this initiative is the enlisting of parents that went through the experience of child removal, services and reunification, to engage and support parents undergoing similar experience. Dickens, et al. (2015) go even further to suggest the participation of parents in ‘Edge of Care’ proceedings, to bring clarity to the case for better decisions and outcomes in favor of the children in the child welfare system.

The literature on legal permanence is defined by reunification, adoption and guardianship. Aging out of foster care is occasionally referenced as a consequence of failure of finding permanence for youth. Avery (2010) examines Independent Living (IL) services in preparing foster youth to live “independently”, and reviews child welfare practice that focuses on lifelong connections to kin and fictive kin as requirements for permanency.


A Summary of the Literature on Physical Permanency

The literature on physical permanency focuses primarily on two aspects: timely placement in a permanent home, as emphasized in the Federal guidelines, and supporting biological caregivers through the reunification process. Carnochan, Moore, and Austin (2013) describe placement stability for children as they develop attachments and relationships to caregivers as crucial for transitioning into permanency. While each situation is unique, research findings document the common factors associated with long stays in foster care and placement instability, producing negative outcomes for many children in foster care. They also discuss factors associated with timely discharge from care, and provide strategies and models for achieving timely permanency (Carnochan, Lee, and Austin, 2013).

In response to the federal guidelines, agencies developed a variety of initiatives and models to test their efficacy in establishing permanency. As an example, Cuyahoga County piloted the Pay-for-Success initiative to serve homeless mothers who have children in care. The county partners with third-party investors and charitable organizations to provide housing and wrap-around services to help mothers deal with barriers (Lester, 2015) to regain custody of their children. The county reimburses the organizations only for reunification cases completed successfully, thus the name Pay-for-Success.

In a study conducted by Holland, Faulkner and Perez-del-Aguila (2004) to examine continuity and stability outcomes for children in out of home care in the UK, there was evidence in favor of sibling co-placement, kinship care, and parental participation, as well as professional foster care and individualized, multidimensional support. In a similar study in Spain, Balsells et al. (2015) identified educational needs for the families when their children were returning home as critical in the process of reunification with their children and adolescents. The study suggested additional ways for intervention that would improve the outcome for the children in care: identifying family strength for positive reinforcement, providing social support through formal and informal networks, empowering families to become agents of support for other families undergoing reunification, and listening to children's voices.

While reunification remains the most desired outcome for children in foster-care in the United States, this does not translate in terms of budgetary allocation. There are very limited federal funds to provide financial assistance to families amidst the reunification process. Sciamanna (2013) sees the lack of support from the federal government as a shortfall that needs to be addressed, especially that families in such a predicament are fragile and need support to help them through the reunification process. Programs, such as the Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) attempt to address this shortfall by safely preventing children receiving in-home child welfare services, from entering or re-entering foster care. An evaluation of the FGDM revealed variability in effectiveness depending on factors such as staff attitude, formation, outlook, and case-load. In terms of outcomes, the evaluation established that families participating in the
Family Group Counseling (FGC) received more social support and support services than families that did not, a factor well-established in the context of child welfare (Allen et al., 2015).

A study conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation revealed that an increasing number of youth are removed every year from their homes due to behavioral problems that communities do not have the resources to deal with without removing youth. In response, the Foundation Child Welfare Strategy Group partnered with state, local, academic institutions and families to provide services and resources for youth to prevent their removal from their biological caregivers’ home, while helping them deal with behavioral issues (Holton, Gerald & Horne 2015).

Physical permanence is a function of both “child safety and emotional security” (Morton, 2016); safety includes emotional security, and emotional insecurity diminishes the sense of physical safety. The recent emphasis on the concepts of trauma-informed care and family preservation has been motivated by the need to preserve the emotional security, necessary for the child to develop the capacity to trust and form healthy relationships.

References:


Social & Relational Permanency:

Social and relational permanence for youth in foster care emphasize on preserving and investing in social relations that have productive benefits (http://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/literature/definition.html), referred to as social capital, fostered by promoting healthy, positive and long lasting relationships with adults. Relational permanence entails long-term, loving, and accepting connections with parental figures such as foster and biological parents, and access to important relations such as siblings, friends, extended family, and boy/girlfriends (Stott & Gustavsson, 2010). The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351) has increased child welfare efforts to move adolescents from foster care to legal permanence through adoption, subsidized guardianship, or relative foster care. The achievement of legal permanence for adolescents is not only a primary goal of child welfare, but is also presumed to translate into relational permanence (Pérez, 2015).

Pérez (2015) examined this presumption with a study that concluded that achieving legal permanence does not assure relational permanence. According to Stott and Gustavsson (2010), pursuing legal permanence can create both relational and ecological permanence; but the pursuit of legal permanence at the expense of relational and ecological or physical permanence may be contributing to a state of instability among foster care youth, hindering their willingness to engage in relationships. According to Samuels (2008), children and youth who have experienced ambiguous losses (Boss, 2006) and multiple moves typical to children in out of home care, miss out on normative opportunities to build important relational and social skills essential for establishing and sustaining relationships.

Stable placement should be paramount in child welfare system as they promote intrapersonal and interpersonal social and emotional competencies that the youth need to become resilient in their transition to young adulthood, even if they initially do not meet the standards of legal permanence (Stott & Gustavsson, 2010). In a controlled study conducted by Ryan, Testa & Zhai (2008) on the effects of foster parent-foster child attachment, commitment, and permanence, indicate that strong levels of attachment decrease the risk of delinquency for youth in foster care, similar to involvement with religious organizations.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in mentoring programs for youth in general, and especially for foster youth. Avery (2011) summarized published research regarding the effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth in foster care, and warned practitioners in child welfare from assuming that relational permanency can be achieved by mentorship programs alone. She pointed that mentoring relationships can serve as compensatory resource contributing to relational permanency but cannot be a substitute for a permanent parental bond. Samuels (2008) suggested drawing from foster youth insights and experience to both enhance existing knowledge and improve the design of programs and interventions intended to help them.

In the context of social and relational permanence for youth in out of home care, Jones and laLiberte (2013) developed the Youth Connections Scale (YCS) to measure the youth connectedness to caring adults, including the number and strength of connections, and the types of support perceived by youth.

While relational permanence is a relatively new concept in child welfare, the importance of strong connections for children in foster care should not be understated. The power of
connections has long been studied in anthropology and sociology to better understand forms of social capital. Not only are the connections that make relational permanence important to health and well-being, they are indicators of resilience and future success.

References:


Samuels, G. M. (2008). A reason, a Season, or a Lifetime: *Relational Permanence Among Young Adults with Foster Care Backgrounds*. Chapin Hall Center for Children; Chicago, IL.
