A Systematic Review of the Impact of Placement Instability on Emotional and Behavioral Outcomes Among Children in Foster Care

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Summary: Foster care children are a highly vulnerable population and their experiences in care are considered crucial to their developmental and psychosocial wellbeing. Three major databases and grey literature sources were searched for all relevant quantitative research published by July 2019. Titles and abstracts of 2419 articles were screened following searches, with full texts obtained for 51 studies and 14 included in the final review. Most notably, there was a lack of consensus on how to quantify and measure placement instability and many studies failed to control for potentially confounding care-related variables.

Application: This is an extensive research project to discuss the impact of placement instability. Results indicated that placement instability was a consistent predictor of externalizing behavior in children, although some evidence was counter-indicative in this regard. There was also evidence to suggest a relationship with internalizing behaviors, and mental health difficulties, in particular PTSD symptoms.

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