

Majority of Quebec children placed in out-of-home care are reunited with their family

August 12 2014

The majority of children in Quebec's youth protection system who are placed in out-of-home care (family foster care, or in a group or rehabilitation centre) are reunited with their "natural" families within 6 months, according to a study led by Professor Tonino Esposito of University of Montreal's School of Social Work.

However, younger children, specifically those aged 2 to 5 years old at initial placement, have the lowest likelihood of returning to live with their natural families over time. "All placed children, irrespective of age, are less likely to return to live with their families if their placement is a result of sexual abuse, family difficulties, such as drug addiction, psychological and emotional violence, or lack of appropriate and adequate parenting, i.e. physical, health, and school neglect. In addition, a lack of socioeconomic resources significantly reduces the chances of reunification," Professor Esposito said.

The results are from a [longitudinal study](#) that was conducted from 2002 to 2011, using clinical-administrative data from 16 youth centres that was merged with Canadian Census data for the province of Quebec. It is currently the largest longitudinal study of its kind in Quebec. "We undertook this study because youth protection services must be based on best practice, yet we know very little about the children, youth, and families involved in these services and even less about the long-term outcomes of these services," Esposito explained. This study is the third part of a broader analysis on the out-of-home placement trajectories of children followed by youth protection services in Quebec. "Our results

are quite surprising. In fact, 77% of the children investigated by child protection are not placed in out-of-home care. The majority of those who are placed experience stable placements and eventually reunify with their families," Esposito said.

A number of placed children, however, experience placement situations characterized by uncertainty, instability, and insecurity. These studies identify two distinct subgroups with problematic placement trajectories: younger children in high-risk environments, and older children whose challenges are mostly related to behaviour problems that compromise their safety and that of others. Again, a lack of socioeconomic resources predicts whether or not a child will be placed. Indeed, among younger children, it is the most determinant factor predicting out-of-home placement. "If a child is placed, moved, or reunified with his or her [family](#), it happens quickly. It is therefore important to provide access to a range of interventions and community services early on in the youth protection intervention process, specifically mental health services for parents with younger children, and older children with behavioural problems. Furthermore, when creating service plans for children admitted to out-of-home care, child protection authorities must evaluate what they are doing to respond to inadequate socioeconomic resources of the families served," Esposito said.

His research will now focus on the impact of placements on [children's](#) behaviour and the possible regional disparities of the needs of the populations served.

More information: References:

Placement of children in out-of-home care in Quebec, Canada : When and for whom initial out-of-home placement is most likely to occur (Esposito et al., 2013)

The stability of child protection placements in Quebec, Canada (Esposito et al., 2014)

Provided by University of Montreal

Citation: Majority of Quebec children placed in out-of-home care are reunited with their family (2014, August 12) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-08-majority-quebec-children-out-of-home-reunited.html>

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