BY JONATHAN KRAUS

Predicting Success of Foster Placements

for School-Age Children

■ **Although the need for objective criteria in selecting foster homes has been stressed repeatedly in the literature, social workers continue to select foster homes on the basis of their subjective judgments. This article attempts to relate certain objective characteristics of foster parents and foster children to the success or failure of foster home placements.** ■

THE SUCCESS OF foster home placements is often defined in the literature in terms of judgments made by caseworkers that are based on some idealized norms. It is true, however, that the ultimate criterion of success is the survival of a placement for the length of time needed to provide substitute parental care for a child. The stability of a placement is important not only for the child's social and emotional adjustment but also from the administrative point of view. Placements that break down put an additional strain on the already overtaxed human and economic resources of social agencies concerned with foster placements and discourage foster parents from further involvement in foster care.

Despite the obvious conclusion that survival of a foster placement is the basic criterion for its success, Taylor and Starr found in reviewing the literature that most studies used the social worker's judgment as the criterion. Even more surprising was

the realization that "there is considerable evidence that the social and psychological distance between social workers and foster parents tends to bias those judgments." They also found that a sound empirical approach to foster home selection was generally lacking. Most authors advocated selection on the basis of "generalizations from [their] thoughts and feelings . . . informal observations and experiences with foster parents . . . [and] results of descriptive and exploratory studies. . . ." In addition, they had conflicting opinions on such fundamental issues as the need for matching children with foster parents, and their definitions of an "adequate" foster home reflected the middle-class values of social workers.[1] This lack of empiricism and objectivity in the approaches to foster home selection appeared to stem from the relatively common attitude among social workers that casework is an art, not a science—an attitude that in its extreme form advocates the use of intuition and imagination and asserts not only that casework is not a science but that it "cannot be a

JONATHAN KRAUS, MA, is Senior Research Officer, Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. The author thanks A. C. Thomas, Under Secretary of the Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare of New South Wales, for permission to publish this paper.

[1] Delores A. Taylor and Phillip Starr, "Foster Parenting: An Integrative Review of the Literature," *Child Welfare*, Vol. 46, No. 7 (July 1967), pp. 371–385.

science; nor should it harbour the design to be a science even if that were possible."[2]

The reluctance to modify the intuitive and judgmental approach to foster home selection persists despite its inefficacy, lack of validity, and the demonstrated superiority of statistical over clinical prediction.[3] Although the need for practice-derived research has been discussed repeatedly in the literature, the number of empirical studies relevant to foster home selection is small.[4] It is also worth noting that the value of a study by Wolins, which appeared to be the most extensive and thoroughly conducted of these investigations, was seriously questioned on both methodological and theoretical grounds by Macdonald and Ferguson.[5] Consequently, as Foy points out, it is not surprising that existing guidelines for decision-making in foster home placements are unpragmatic, atomistic, and consist mainly of abstract norms that are difficult to apply in practice. Foy argues that the guidelines needed by social workers for matching children with foster parents should be founded in practice; should be interpreted in relation to each other, not in isolation; and

should be based on verifiable criteria of success. He suggests that such guidelines could be provided by "experience tables" with practice-derived typologies defining the matrix categories.[6] In this context the obvious verifiable criterion for successful placement would be its survival over a specified period of time.

THE STUDY

The present study was designed to implement some of the suggestions made by Foy, and its specific purpose was (1) to investigate the relationship of selected objectively definable characteristics of children and foster parents to the success of foster home placements, (2) to establish a taxonomy of children and foster parents based on these characteristics, and (3) to construct experience tables that could be used as guidelines for successful matching of children with foster parents.

The sample was restricted to children 6 years of age or older who were in their first foster home placement, had no siblings living in the same foster home, and had been living in the foster home for at least twenty-four months by March 31, 1969. The Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare of New South Wales made 268 such foster home placements between March 1, 1965, and March 31, 1967. The minimum information required for the study was only available for 214 placements, however. These 214 placements consisted

[2] Morton I. Teicher, "Social Casework—Science or Art?" Child Welfare, Vol. 46, No. 7 (July 1967), pp. 393–396.

[3] J. McVicker Hunt, "On the Judgment of Social Workers as a Source of Information in Social Work Research," in Ann W. Shyne, ed., Use of Judgments as Data in Social Work Research (New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1959), pp. 38–54; Martin Wolins, Selecting Foster Parents (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 147–151; Edward Foy, "The Decision-Making Problem in Foster Care," Child Welfare, Vol. 46, No. 9 (November 1967), pp. 498–503; Daniel Glaser, "Automated Research and Correctional Practices," California Youth Authority, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Winter 1965), pp. 24–31; Jack Sawyer, "Measurement and Prediction, Clinical and Statistical," Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 66, No. 3 (September 1966), pp. 178–200; and D. V. Babst, D. M. Gottfredson, and K. B. Ballard, "Comparison of Multiple Regression and Configural Analysis Techniques for Developing Base Expectancy Tables," Journal of Research on Crime and Delinquency, Vol. 5, No. 1 (January 1968), pp. 72–80.

[4] Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (New York: Free Press, 1949); Joseph F. Meisels and Martin B. Loeb, "Unanswered Questions about Foster Care," Social Service Review, Vol. 30, No. 3 (September 1956), pp. 239–245; Foy, op. cit.; and Taylor and Starr, op. cit.

[5] Mary E. Macdonald and Marjorie F. Ferguson, "Selecting Foster Parents: An Essay Review," Social Service Review, Vol. 38, No. 3 (September 1964), pp. 316–327; Taylor and Starr, op. cit.; and Wolins, op. cit.

[6] Foy, op. cit.

of 172 placements in foster homes and 42 placements with relatives acting as foster parents. Of the 172 children in foster homes, 15 were restored to their natural parents before twenty-four months had elapsed. Consequently, the size of the actual sample was 157. In this group, 79 placements survived for at least twenty-four months and thus were classified as successful. Seventy-eight placements broke down before twenty-four months had elapsed and were classified as failures. The size of each of the two populations ($n=78$) had a distribution-free sample tolerance limit of 95 percent with $p=0.90$ confidence probability.

The number of characteristics of the sample was restricted to increase the power of statistical analysis of the relevant variables. The rationale for restricting the ages of the children was that the rate of breakdown for placements involving preschool children was so low in the experience of this department that it was not considered a problem. This experience is also consistent with the findings reported in the literature.[7] The restriction to first foster placements was based on indications that failure rates increase with each successive placement.[8] The restriction on the child's siblings being placed in the same home was based on findings that there is a significant positive relationship between the success of foster placements and the presence of siblings in these placements.[9] Length of residence was restricted because, in this study, success is defined as the survival of a foster home placement for a minimum of two years.[10]

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[7] G. Trasler, *In Place of Parents* (London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 215; and M. O. Oswald, "An Analysis of Some Factors Associated with Success and Failure in Foster Home Placements," *Australian Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (May 1964), pp. 17–21.

[8] Oswald, op. cit.

[9] Trasler, op. cit.

RELEVANT DATA

The relevant data collected for foster children consisted of the following: sex, chronological age, intelligence level (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children or Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, full-scale IQ), date of placement, and date of termination (if a breakdown occurred). For foster parents the data included religion(s) of the foster parents; chronological ages; occupations; number of natural, adopted, or foster children (excluding the present foster child); combined weekly income; reasons for wanting a foster child; preference in sex and age; number of children in the household who were within two years of the current foster child's age; number of persons living in the house (including the foster child); number of rooms in the house; and the caseworker's assessment of the foster parents' ability to cope with a child's behavior problems (e.g., enuresis, emotional disturbances, mental retardation, and so on). In addition, a crowding index was calculated for each foster home by dividing the number of residents into the number of rooms in the house.

For purposes of analysis, the motives for becoming foster parents were classified into the following four categories:

1. "Generally interested." This category comprised foster parents who had no clearly stated motives except an interest in caring for a child, including underprivileged or handicapped children; sharing their home with a child; helping a child because one of the foster parents had been orphaned, underprivileged, or had grown up in an institution, and so forth.

2. "Know child." The foster parents expressed an interest in a specific child for a

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[10] "Breakdown of Foster Home Placements." Unpublished paper, Department of Child Welfare, New South Wales, Australia, 1966. This definition was based on the findings that 50 percent of foster placements break down within two years and 54 percent within six years. Thus the chances of a placement breaking down after two years are small.

TABLE 1. PREDICTION OF SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENT WHEN COMBINED CHARACTERISTICS OF FOSTER HOME INCLUDE FOSTER PARENTS' MOTIVATION, NUMBER OF RESIDENTS, AND FOSTER MOTHER'S AGE
(statistical probabilities and standard errors)

Motivation of Foster Parents	Four Persons in Home [a]		Other than Four Persons in Home [a]	
	Age of foster mother		Age of foster mother	
	46 or older	45 or younger	46 or older	45 or younger
Generally interested	—	$.67 \pm .19$	$.82 \pm .12$	$.70 \pm .08$
Know child	—	$.33 \pm .19$	$.83 \pm .14$	$.55 \pm .11$
Want company for own child	—	$.14 \pm .08$	—	$.26 \pm .10$

[a] Includes current foster child.

variety of reasons (e.g., they had spent one or more holidays with the child, had known the child before he had become a ward of the state, and so on).

3. "Want company for own child." This motivation was often inferred from the family situation or from comments made by the foster parents (e.g., foster parents had four preadolescent daughters and one small son and had applied for a foster child of the son's age).

4. "Want a child." A variety of reasons were included in this category (e.g., the foster parents were interested in taking a foster child as a preliminary to adoption, wanted to replace a lost child of their own, and so on).

As mentioned earlier, a successful foster placement was defined as one that survived for a continuous period of twenty-four months or longer and a failure was defined as a placement that broke down before twenty-four months had expired.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The relationship of the characteristics of children and foster parents to successful placement was analyzed statistically.[11] The following characteristics were found to have

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[11] The data were analyzed by calculating overall chi-squares for contingency tables and, when appropriate, the chi-squares were partitioned into components (A. E. Maxwell, *Analyzing Qualitative Data* [London, England: Methuen & Co., 1961], pp. 56–60). Yates Correction for Continuity was used in fourfold tables in which any cell had $n=5$.

a significant positive association with success: (1) foster mother is 46 years of age or older, (2) foster parents have two children of their own, (3) another foster child is already present in the home, (4) number of persons (including current foster child) residing in the home is greater or less than four, (5) foster parents' motivation is "generally interested" or "know child." In addition, the motivation "want company for own child" was found to have a significant negative association with success.

When the data were reanalyzed to find the relationships between successful placement and individual characteristics, however, the positive association was found not to hold. (While individual characteristics were being analyzed, the others were controlled by excluding them or holding them constant.) Therefore, the findings indicate that successful placement does not depend on the presence of a single characteristic but on the interaction of a number of them. Thus the need for multidimensional experience tables is confirmed.

In the actual construction of these experience tables, no more than three variables could be used at one time because the number of individual cases was relatively small. Because motivation had the strongest association with success of placement, it was included in all tables, while the remaining four variables were tabulated with motivation in all possible combinations of two variables at a time (except for the combination of "number of own children" and "number of persons residing in foster home" because one variant of it was repre-

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sented by only two cases). The motivational category "want a child" was not used at all because it was represented by only thirteen cases. The probabilities of successful placement, based on various combinations of three variables, are shown in Tables 1 through 5.

On visual inspection the interrelationships (correlation matrix) of characteristics associated with success did not show any clusters that could serve as a basis for a taxonomy (the matrix was too small for a formal cluster or factor analysis). A taxonomy of foster homes was made, however, by arbitrarily using the four motivational classifications as axes for the correlation clusters on which four descriptive categories of foster homes are based (see Table 6).

DISCUSSION

It was found in this study that no relationship existed between the outcome of foster home placements and the sex, age, and intelligence of foster children. Thus the need for parent-child matching that is frequently advocated in the literature seems questionable.[12] This finding also defeated one of the main purposes of the study—to establish a taxonomy of children that could be used in such matching.

The negative finding regarding the sex of foster children is consistent with the results of a study by Oswald.[13] The negative

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12 Taylor and Starr, op. cit.
13 Oswald, op. cit.

TABLE 2. PREDICTION OF SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENT WHEN COMBINED CHARACTERISTICS OF FOSTER HOME INCLUDE FOSTER PARENTS' MOTIVATION, FOSTER MOTHER'S AGE, AND PRESENCE OF OTHER FOSTER CHILDREN
(statistical probabilities and standard errors)

Motivation of Foster Parents	Foster Mother 46 or Older		Foster Mother 45 or Younger	
	Foster children present	No foster children	Foster children present	No foster children
Generally interested	—	.70±.14	.95±.07 ª	.59±.09
Know child	—	.86±.09	—	.52±.09
Want company for own child	—	.43±.19	—	.21±.07

ª $p=1.00$ was arbitrarily changed to .95 so that the standard error could be computed.

TABLE 3. PREDICTION OF SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENT WHEN COMBINED CHARACTERISTICS OF FOSTER HOME INCLUDE FOSTER PARENTS' MOTIVATION, FOSTER MOTHER'S AGE, AND NUMBER OF FOSTER PARENTS' OWN CHILDREN
(statistical probabilities and standard errors)

Motivation of Foster Parents	Foster Mother 46 or Older		Foster Mother 45 or Younger	
	Two own children	Other than two own children	Two own children	Other than two own children
Generally interested	.83±.15	.63±.17	.67±.14	.71±.09
Know child	—	.83±.11	.71±.17	.43±.11
Want company for own child	—	—	.33±.19	.18±.07

TABLE 4. PREDICTION OF SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENT WHEN COMBINED CHARACTERISTICS OF FOSTER HOME INCLUDE FOSTER PARENTS' MOTIVATION, NUMBER OF OWN CHILDREN, AND PRESENCE OF OTHER FOSTER CHILDREN
(statistical probabilities and standard errors)

Motivation of Foster Parents	Two Own Children		Other Than Two Own Children	
	Foster children present	No foster children	Foster children present	No foster children
Generally interested	—	.64±.13	.89±.10	.61±.10
Know child	—	.75±.15	—	.61±.08
Want company for own chlid	—	.38±.17	—	.22±.07

TABLE 5. PREDICTION OF SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENT WHEN COMBINED CHARACTERISTICS OF FOSTER HOME INCLUDE FOSTER PARENTS' MOTIVATION, NUMBER OF RESIDENTS,[a] AND PRESENCE OF OTHER FOSTER CHILDREN
(statistical probabilities and standard errors)

Motivation of Foster Parents	Four Persons Reside in Home [a]		Other Than Four Persons [a] Reside in Home	
	Foster children present	No foster children	Foster children present	No foster children
Generally interested	—	.50±.20	.95±.07[b]	.65±.09
Know child	—	.57±.19	—	.65±.08
Want company for own child	—	.21±.08	—	.29±.10

[a] Including the current foster child.
[b] $p=1.00$ was arbitrarily changed to .95 so that the standard error could be computed.

relationship regarding age, however, is not in line with the inverse relationship between the ages of foster children and rates of success for foster placements as reported in the literature.[14] Although "good" foster homes were reported to be equally successful with retarded and normal children,[15] and intelligence was not found to be related to success in the present study, it must be noted that the difference between the failure rates of the mentally deficient children (IQs of 69 or less) and normal children found in this study would have been statistically significant but for

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[14] See Walter J. Ambinder, "The Extent of Successive Placements Among Boys in Foster Family Homes," Child Welfare, Vol. 44, No. 7 (July 1965), pp. 397-398; Leslie W. Hunter, "Foster Homes for Teenagers," Children, Vol. 11, No. 6 (November-December 1964), p. 234; and Oswald, op. cit.

[15] Mabel Rich, "Foster Homes for Retarded Children," Child Welfare, Vol. 44, No. 7 (July 1965), pp. 392-394.

the small size of the sample. Therefore, although the results of this study indicated that placements of children with borderline intelligence are as successful as those of normal children, in a larger sample mentally deficient children possibly could have significantly higher rates of failure.

Of particular interest was the absence of a relationship between successful placement and agreement between the foster child's sex and age with those desired by the foster parents. The finding relating to placements of children of the opposite sex to that desired by foster parents must be viewed with caution because the number of such placements was small, but placements of children two or more years older than the age desired were common (41 percent of all placements), and such placements did not have higher failure rates than those in which foster parents' age preferences were met.

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TABLE 6. FOUR DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES OF FOSTER HOMES AND THE PROBABILITY OF SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENT WHEN AT LEAST FOUR OR ALL FIVE CHARACTERISTICS FOR EACH CATEGORY ARE PRESENT

Description of Foster Home	Characteristics of Home [a]	Probability of Success and Standard Errors
Very successful	Foster mother 46 or older Two own children One or more foster children Other than four residents [b] Motivation "generally interested"	$.92 \pm .08$
Moderately successful	Foster mother 46 or older Other than two own children No foster children Other than four residents [b] Motivation "know child"	$.70 \pm .08$
Moderately unsuccessful	Foster mother 46 or older No own children, or any number One or more foster children Other than four residents [b] Motivation "want a child"	$.50 \pm .20$
Very unsuccessful	Foster mother 45 or younger Other than two own children No foster children Four residents [b] Motivation "want company for own child"	$.21 \pm .07$

[a] When four characteristics are used for prediction, foster parents' motivation must be included.
[b] Including current foster child.

What was the rationale for investigating the socioeconomic characteristics of foster homes, apart from the pragmatic consideration that such data are invariably collected by social agencies dealing with foster placements? The accessibility and objective character of the data do not justify its use unless the data is known or expected to be relevant to the study. The answer is that certain objective characteristics of foster homes are known to be related to the outcome of foster placements (e.g., foster mother's age, presence of other children, and so on).[16] In the light of social role theory, all such characteristics could represent indexes of attitudes, values, and secondary traits that have attained a degree of functional autonomy and thus could be factors in foster parent–child relationships. Such objective indexes, if found to be re-

lated to the outcome of foster placements, would be of greater practical value to the caseworker when selecting a foster home than the subjective procedures advocated in the literature, such as understanding the emotional makeup of the foster parents, the vulnerable areas in the emotional makeup of the child, and other time-consuming psychoanalytic-type assessments.[17] In this context it was interesting to note that placements with foster parents assessed by the social workers as having the ability to cope with a child with behavior problems were no more successful than other foster placements.

Of the fifteen characteristics of foster homes investigated in the present study, six had a significant or nearly significant relationship to outcome of placement when they were associated with other characteristics, but none were related to outcome

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[16] Trasler, op. cit.

[17] Taylor and Starr, op. cit.

when considered individually (although two showed a trend toward such a relationship). These findings support Foy's contention that in making placement decisions it is necessary to consider the dynamic interplay of many factors, not the individual elements of a situation in isolation.[18]

It was found that a significantly greater number of placements survived when the foster mother was 46 years of age or older.[19] This finding is consistent with those reported by Trasler and Rich, and Trasler's explanaton that higher failure rates occur among younger foster mothers because they seek a companion for their own child agrees with the finding in the present study that there is a significant negative correlation between the foster mother being age 46 years or older and the motivation to take a foster child as a companion for her own child.[20]

The variables reflecting the foster parents' socioeconomic status (occupation, income, number of rooms in the house, crowding index) were found to be unrelated to the outcome of placements. Because in this case the variables were to serve as indexes, these negative findings can be interpreted to show that social roles imposed on foster parents by their socioeconomic status do not comprise values and attitudes, nor do they generate traits that are relevant to foster care. Also important was the finding that foster mothers who worked full time were as successful as those who did not work, which indicates that the usual reluctance of social agencies to place a child in a foster home when the mother works is unwarranted.

There was a trend for a greater number of successful placements in homes in which the foster parents had two children of their

own or in which one or more foster children were already residing. No relationship was found between the presence of adopted children or children near to the age of the current foster child and the outcome of placement. The finding that a significantly greater number of placements failed when there were four residents in the foster home (including the current foster child) is meaningful only when examined in relation to the foster parents' motivation and the number of their own children. It can be inferred that in the homes with a high failure rate and in which there are four residents, the residents are the foster parents, their natural, adopted, or foster child, and the current foster child and that the foster parents were motivated to take the current foster child as a companion for their own child. As noted in the literature, this type of foster home is a poor prospect for successful placement.[21]

The finding that placements tend to be more successful when foster parents have two children of their own is difficult to explain and does not appear to have a counterpart in the literature. Obviously such foster parents are not looking for a companion for their own child, but neither are those who have more than two children; yet they are not as successful. Wolins reported that a greater number of "superior" foster homes had two or three children than did "inferior" homes, and Hunter found the greatest number of failures occurred when foster parents had four or more natural children and the least failures occurred when there was no natural child in the home.[22] The trend for more successful placements in homes in which a foster child is already present agrees with Trasler's findings, but inconsistent with his findings and with the assertions made by Charnley was the lack of relationship found in the present study between the presence

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[18] Foy, op. cit.

[19] The foster fathers' ages were disregarded for the purposes of analysis and prediction because of their obvious correlation with the ages of foster mothers.

[20] Trasler, op. cit.; and Rich, op. cit.

[21] Neil Kay, "A Systematic Approach to Selecting Foster Parents," *Case Conference*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 1966), pp. 44–50; and Trasler, op. cit.

[22] Wolins, op. cit.; and Hunter, op. cit.

of natural children of an age close to that of the foster child and the failure of foster placements.[23]

MOTIVATION AND SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENT

It was found in this study that there are highly significant differences among the rates of successful foster placements associated with the various categories of motivation on the part of foster parents. The motivation "generally interested" was most successful, with "know child," "want a child," and "want company for own child" following in that order. Of the four categories of motivation, "generally interested" and "want company for own child" were significantly correlated with success (the former positively and the latter negatively). The "know child" category showed a trend toward significance, and no trend was shown for "want a child."

Because the basic data for the investigation of motives seemed inadequate in both content and method of collection, the finding that the motivation of foster parents had a closer association with the outcome of placements than any of the other variables investigated was unexpected. However, the validity of this finding is supported by the fact that it occurred despite the inadequate data. Furthermore, had the data been collected with the express purpose of assessing motivation, the statistical significance of the results probably would have been even higher.[24]

There appears to be agreement among the experts that the motives categorized as "want company for own child" and "want a child" indicate poor chances for a successful foster placement,[25] whereas the motives categorized as "generally interested" and "know child" indicate the likelihood of a successful placement.[26] The present finding that motivation alone is not related to the outcome of a foster placement highlights a crucial facet of motivation that is mentioned explicitly or implicitly only by a few authors—namely, the motives of foster parents cannot be viewed in isolation; they must be examined in the context of other factors (e.g., those shown in experience tables) in the foster parents' lives.[27] In fact, the findings indicate that motivation is a product of the interaction of such factors and that they alone could be used for predicting outcome of placements. Thus motivation could remain an unidentified intervening variable.

Although it was impossible to construct prediction tables based on more than three variables at a time, a taxonomy of foster homes was derived from the correlation matrix in Table 6, which allows predictions based on the most typical combina-

[23] Jean Charnley, *The Art of Child Placement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), pp. 177–178.

[24] Another procedural facet that supports the validity of this finding is that the categorization and designation of the categories were done by two psychologists who had no background in foster care or the motivations of foster parents. The designations that emerged, however, are almost identical to those reported in the literature. Equally important, the relationship between the categories of motivation and successful placement found in this study is generally consistent with the findings or observations of other investigators.

[25] Charlotte G. Babcock, "Some Psychodynamic Factors in Foster Parenthood—Part I," *Child Welfare*, Vol. 44, No. 9 (November 1965), pp. 485–493; David Fanshel, *Foster Parenthood: A Role Analysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), pp. 5–7, 142–152; Charnley, op. cit.; Trasler, op. cit.; and Kay, op. cit.

[26] R. W. Colvin, "Towards the Development of a Foster Parent Attitude Test," *Quantitative Approaches to Parent Selection* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1962); H. B. M. Murphy, "Foster Home Variables and Adult Outcomes," *Mental Hygiene*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (October 1964), pp. 587–599; Rich, op. cit.; and Kay, op. cit.

[27] Irene Josselyn, "Evaluating Motives of Foster Parents," *Child Welfare*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (January 1952), pp. 3–9, 13–14; Eugene A. Weinstein, *The Self-Image of the Foster Child* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1960), pp. 7–8; and Foy, op. cit.

tions of four or five variables. In constructing the taxonomy, because motivation had the strongest association with success, the four categories of motivation were used as axes for the correlation clusters on which the types of foster homes were based. Their use as axes makes them comparable with factors, but while factors derived by factor analysis are usually assumed to have a causal significance, the motivational categories are without doubt the effects of interaction of the variables correlated with them.

Prediction tables probably provide the most graphic illustration of the dependence of motivation on the context in which it occurs. For example, Table 3 shows that when the foster mothers are 46 years of age or older and have two natural children, the motive for becoming a foster parent is almost exclusively "generally interested," whereas in the homes with younger foster mothers and the same number of natural children, the motives are varied. The interaction effects, which make the overall context of a foster home more than the sum of its parts in terms of its relationship to motivation and the outcome of placements, make it necessary to construct prediction tables based on the greatest possible number of relevant factors. However, tables constructed on many factors are usually impracticable because of the size of the samples they require. When the sample is too small to represent all combinations of a number of variables, one method of bypassing the difficulty of prediction is to find the combinations that occur most commonly in practice and establish the probabilities of the wanted events associated with them. This procedure was adopted in the construction of Table 6, which allowed predictions to be made using four or five variables at the same time.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to relate selected characteristics of foster parents and foster children to the success or failure of foster home placements. Significant relationships were found to be contingent upon the interactions of various characteristics— no individual characteristic was significantly correlated with outcome of placement when other relevant characteristics were controlled. The successful placement, defined as one that survived for twenty-four months or more, was found to be related positively to the following factors: the foster mother was 46 years of age or older, the foster parents had two children of their own, a foster child was already present in the home, the number of persons residing in the home was other than four (including the current foster child), the foster parents were motivated by a general interest in helping a child or by knowing a specific child (rather than wanting a companion for their own child or wanting to satisfy their own emotional needs).

Prediction tables were constructed that indicate the probabilities of success associated with the various combinations of the relevant characteristics of foster homes. It should be noted that prediction tables are meant to help, not substitute for, the caseworker's placement decisions. Because the present findings indicate that the success of placements involving school-age children depends on the selection of foster homes, not on matching homes and children, the use of prediction tables could be questioned on the grounds that the problem of selection is irrelevant in practice because there is a chronic shortage of foster homes. The answer to this is that although comparative studies of the long-term adjustment of those children brought up in institutions and those brought up in a series of foster homes are lacking, there is little doubt that a school-age child's socialization, self-concept, and emotional stability are more adversely affected by frequent changes in foster homes. Consequently, prediction tables could be used to eliminate potential foster homes that have a low probability for successful outcome.