What factors contribute to foster caregiver burnout?

Foster, Adoption, & Kinship Caregiver Preservice Training

A Scoping Review is a systematic approach to synthesizing the results of a sampling of a body of research. The review includes a brief assessment of the quality of the body of research and synthesis of study findings that address the scoping question. In conducting a Scoping Review, reviewers attempt to provide the following information about the sampling of research to address the stated question:

- Is there any research to inform the scoping question?
- What is the quality of the research on the topic?
- What are the research findings that inform the scoping question?

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What factors contribute to foster caregiver burnout?

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2.1. Finding Evidence

A team of researchers conducted a search of the following resources:

- EBSCO*host* library database- This database included the reference catalogues of *PsycINFO, Psychology & Behavioral Sciences Collection, Social Sciences Abstract, SocIndex, and Sociological Collection*
- National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections
- Child Welfare Information Gateway

This review included materials that were published or developed after January of 2000 and prior to January 31, 2014 and were available in the English language.

Search terms (key words and phrases) were entered into EBSCO*host* in the exact order presented below. Results in EBSCO*host* were limited to peer reviewed journals and dissertations.

Connector	Search Terms	Location
	(foster AND (parent* OR care* OR caregiv* OR "care giv*"))	Abstract
AND	burnout OR "burn-out" OR "burn out" OR "compassion fatigue" OR "secondary trauma" OR "vicarious trauma" OR quit* OR attrition OR discontinue*	Abstract

2.2 Article Assessment

Researchers reviewed the titles produced in from each source to determine if they answer the question and meet the pre-determined inclusion criteria. Corresponding abstracts for all titles retained during the title review were reviewed to determine if the articles still seem to answer the research question and meet the pre-determined inclusion criteria. Articles that remained were reviewed for the same purpose. Following this review, all articles that answered the research question and met the pre-determined inclusion criteria were subjected to quality assessment. The results of each review are outlined here.

Source	Titles	Abstract	Full Review	Quality Assessment
EBSCO*host*	106	12	11	
NRCPFC	5	2	0	
Child Welfare Information Gateway	0	0	0	11	0

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Methodology

Researchers recorded the following data on the Quality Assessment form:

- Study Citation
- Research Question or Hypothesis(es)
- Study Sampling Strategy
- Research Design
- Data Collection Methods
- Study Findings
- Study Limitations
- Sources of Bias

Researchers synthesized study findings and data on article quality. This synthesis is presented in the findings section.

3.1 Research Quality

The quality of the research included in this review varied. Research design is summarized in Table 1.

Design	Quantity
Experimental	0
Quasi-Experimental	0
Observational	9
Qualitative	0

Although this sample of research did not include any experimental or quasi-experimental research, observational research is appropriate for the type of question this review seeks to answer. This body of research has several characteristics that can increase one's confidence in the findings.

- Study sample sizes were quite large. Four of the studies used samples of current or former foster caregivers that were larger than 100. Generally, a large sample size increases the strength of study results.
- All study samples used a convenience or snowball sampling strategy. While this method is necessary and appropriate for this type of research, it does limit the ability to generalize study findings to a larger population.
- Six studies utilized surveys and instruments with established reliability.
- Research reports for four of the studies provided enough information that study methods could be replicated.
- Most studies did not reflect author bias. One study presents information using a Christianity-based framework, which could present some bias.

Some study characteristics limit one's ability to use these study findings with confidence.

- While a few authors discussed study limitations, several authors presented conclusions that could not fully be supported by study findings.
- All studies used sampling strategies that do not permit generalizability to larger populations.

- Most of the studies relied on self-reported data. Although necessary, there are potential issues that arise when relying solely on this type of data.
- The conceptualization of burnout, drop out, and retention of foster caregivers varied between studies. Without consistent definitions, it's difficult to compare or synthesize findings from multiple studies.

3.2 Study Findings

Foster caregivers report the following reasons for quitting:
- Lack of communication with the child welfare agency (Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Samya, 2009; Geiger, Hayes, & Lietz, 2013).
- Inadequate support from agency staff (Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Samya, 2009; Geiger, Hayes, & Lietz, 2013).
- Lack of specific services such as daycare, respite and financial reimbursement (Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Geiger, Hayes, & Lietz, 2013).
- Difficulty managing behaviors of foster children (Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Washington, 2006).
- Lack of transportation (Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001).
- Lack of adequate training to prepare foster caregivers for their role (Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001).
- Lack of training or information on working with teenagers, fostering children of a different race or cultural background, foster children's feelings about birth parents, and working with birth parents (Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001).
- Feeling emotionally exhausted (Washington, 2006).
- Having a higher external locus of control—ie, belief that things are controlled by external factors (Geiger, Hayes, & Lietz, 2013).
- Having more family tensions (Geiger, Hayes, & Lietz, 2013).
- Feeling like they are not part of the team (Geiger, Hayes, & Lietz, 2013).

- Having fewer years of experience (Samya, 2009).
- Adopting a child (Samya, 2009).

Additional findings related to foster caregiver burnout:
- The greater the foster caregiver perceives the child's risk to be, the more likely they are to experience burnout or emotional exhaustion (Dilley, 2006).
- The older the foster caregiver, the less likely they were to experience burnout (Dilley, 2006; Quagliana, 2007; McClain, 2008).
- Foster caregivers who experience burnout are more likely to experience compassion fatigue (Blanchette, 2010; McClain, 2008).
- Foster caregivers who reported higher levels of compassion satisfaction, empathic concern, perspective taking, and forgiveness were less likely to experience burnout (Blanchette, 2010). Specifically, caregivers who experience compassion satisfaction are less likely to experience foster caregiver burnout (McClain, 2008; Dyer, 2005).
- Foster caregivers who used more formal services were more likely to experience burnout or emotional exhaustion (Quagliana, 2007).
- Foster caregivers with foster children who used more formal services were less likely to experience burnout or emotional exhaustion (Quagliana, 2007).
- Foster caregiver characteristics that are related to burnout (McClain, 2008):
  - Education level
  - Employment
  - Personal trauma
- Foster care environmental characteristics related to burnout (McClain, 2008):
  - Number of children in the home
  - Number of adults in the home

4. Conclusions

There is considerable research related to foster caregiver burnout and reasons for deciding to quit caregiving. Although this research is observational and often lacks necessary controls to promote internal and external validity, it does provide adequate information to address the scoping question. The most commonly cited factor related to foster caregiver burnout was that of compassion satisfaction. This suggests that those foster caregivers who find satisfaction with their role as a caregiver are less likely to experience burnout. Also, foster caregivers who access the services they need for the children in their home are less likely to experience burnout. This is supported by findings that suggest that foster caregivers who have supportive services in place are less likely to quit and those that have difficulty managing the behaviors of children in their home are more likely to quit.

In addition to factors related to burnout, this scoping examined reasons that foster caregivers quit. The scoping team assumed that a foster caregiver's decision to quit may often be related to burnout. Three of the most commonly cited reasons for quitting foster caregiving were related to support of the caregiver by the agency and the caseworker. These include lack of communication between the caregiver and the agency/caseworker; inadequate support of the caregiver by the caseworker; and lack of supportive services such as daycare, transportation, and financial reimbursement. This suggests agencies and caseworkers can impact a caregiver's decision to quit. Also, having this information may help a caregiver anticipate these challenges and plan accordingly.

Much of the research also points to factors such as age of the caregiver, education level, caregiver employment, number of adults in the home and number of children in the home that relate to caregiver burnout. Unfortunately, there are few strategies to address these types of factors.

5.1. Articles Retained After Full Review

Blanchette, J. A. (2010). Compassion Fatigue, Forgiveness, and Empathy in Foster Parents. ProQuest LLC: UMI Dissertation Publishing.

Dilley, C. (2006). Burnout in Foster/Adoptive Parents, Child Strengths and Risk Factors, and the Intention to Adopt. ProQuest Information and Learning Company: UMI Dissertations.

Dyer, C. T. (2005). Assessing Factors that Impact Burnout in Therapeutic Foster Parents. ProQuest LLC: UMI Dissertations

Geiger, J. M., Hayes, M.J., & Lietz, C.A. (2013). Should I stay or should I go? A mixed methods study examining the factors influencing foster parents' decisions to continue or discontinue providing foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35,* 1356-1365.

McClain, K. M. (2008). The Impact of Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, and Compassion Satisfaction on Foster Parents. ProQuest LLC: UMI Dissertations.

Quagliana, H. L. (2007). Relationships Between Child Distress, Resources Utilization, an Foster/Adoptive Parent Burnout. ProQuest LLC: UMI Dissertations.

Rhodes, K. W., Orme, J. G., & Buehler, C. (2001). A Comparison of Family Foster Parents Who Quit, Consider Quitting, and Plan to Continue Fostering. Social Service Review, 75(1), 84-114.

Samya, M.M. (2009). Retaining Foster Parents: Factors Influencing Retention and Attrition. ProQuest LLC: UMI Dissertations.

Washington, K. (2006). Factors Contributing to Attrition and Placement Breakdown in Foster Care. ProQuest LLC: UMI Dissertations.

5.2. Articles Excluded After Full Review

Cohen, J.L. (2010). Enhancing Retention of Foster Parents: The Role of Motivational Interviewing. ProQuest LLC: UMI Dissertations.

Suyama, S.I. (2006). A Comprehensive Intervention for Foster Parents to Reduce Burn Out. ProQuest LLC: UMI Dissertations.