EXTERNALIZING PROBLEMS IN YOUNG FOSTER CHILDREN: PREVALENCE RATES, PREDICTORS AND SERVICE USE

F. Vanschoonlandt, *J. Vanderfaeillie, F. Van Holen, S. De Maeyer, M. Robberechts*

Clinical and Lifespan Psychology, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Belgium

Objective: Examining the prevalence of externalizing problems, its predictors and the mental health service use for these problems by foster children and foster parents in a representative group of foster children aged 3 to 12 in Flanders.
Method: Survey data were collected on 212 foster children, who had been in the foster family for approximately four months. Foster parents filled out a Child Behavior Checklist to measure foster children's externalizing problems. Foster care workers reported on several potential risk variables for externalizing problems and on foster children's and foster parent's mental health service use. Predictors of externalizing problems were identified from a large number of variables using the method of purposeful selection of variables in logistic regression.
Results: 40.6% of the foster children had externalizing problems. Foster children who were placed because of behavioral problems and whose parents received home based family support prior to the out-of-home placement had more externalizing problems. Only 20.9% of the foster children with externalizing problems and only 13.9% of their foster parents received professional help.
Conclusions: This study showed that externalizing problems are prevalent in this young foster care population, that it is hard to predict which foster children had externalizing problems, and that foster children and their foster parents rarely receive services for these problems. These findings call for a standard protocol of assessment of foster children's externalizing problems. Moreover, from a preventive viewpoint, guidelines are needed to systematically link young foster children with externalizing problems and their foster parents to appropriate services.