Introduction

• Birth parents are typically highly committed to their children, and expect to have a life-long relationship with them.
• For children placed into out of home care, caregivers may vary in their commitment.
• Higher commitment in foster parents of infants is linked to higher likelihood of adoption or long-term placement (Dozier & Lindheim, 2006).
• Out of home care sometimes takes the form of foster care, where children live with caregivers in a home environment.
• Sometimes out of home care takes the form of group care, where children live with caregivers who live with them for a series of several days and then are replaced by other adults (cottage care), or who rotate through in shifts (shift care).
• Given that foster care represents a more home-like environment than group care, it was expected to be associated with higher levels of commitment than group care.

Current Study

• This study examined commitment among foster parents, cottage workers, and shift workers for adolescents.
• We hypothesized that foster parents would display higher levels of commitment than caregivers in group care settings.

Method

Participants

• 31 foster parents, 28 cottage care workers, 18 shift care workers from a large southern state.
• Children ranged in age from 13 to 17 years old.
• Attempts were made to make groups similar in child gender and child age

Procedure

• Interviews were completed over the phone and recorded for later coding.

Measures

Primary Outcome: Commitment

• Commitment was assessed using the This Is My Child Interview.
• Commitment is defined as the degree to which the caregivers thought of the children as their own.
• Commitment was scored on a scale from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating higher levels of commitment.

Covariate: Problem Behaviors

• Child externalizing behavior was assessed using the Brief Problem Monitor (Achenbach, McConaughy, Ivanova, & Rescorla, 2011).
• The BPM includes 19 items and measures externalizing (7 items), internalizing (6 items), and attention problems (6 items).

Types of Care

Foster Care

• Children live with foster parents.

Group Care

Cottage Care

• Staff (sometimes referred to as house parents) work for a series of days and then take a series of days off.

Shift Care

• Staff members work shifts, typically with a 6-10 hour shift and are then replaced by other staff.

Results

Caregiver Commitment Levels

• There was a main effect for Type of Care (foster/cottage/shift), with foster parents showing higher levels of commitment than cottage care and shift care workers, (F(2, 74) = 7.36, p < .01).
• The association remained significant when controlling for child externalizing behavior (F(2, 59) = 4.91, p < .05).

Discussion

• These findings support the hypothesis that foster parents feel greater commitment to their children than cottage and shift care workers.
• Commitment is expected to be especially important for vulnerable adolescents who have been placed into out of home care.
• These findings suggest the importance of placing children into foster homes when possible.

Selected References