“Siblings Wish to Be Adopted Together”: An Exploratory Study of Descriptions of Sibling Relationship in State Photolistsings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Type</th>
<th>event;event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Frost, Reihonna L.; Goldberg, Abbie E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOI</td>
<td><a href="https://doi.org/10.7275/R5HD7SXM">https://doi.org/10.7275/R5HD7SXM</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download date</td>
<td>2024-06-23 02:58:43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link to Item</td>
<td><a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/43040">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/43040</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Siblings wish to be adopted together”: An Exploratory Study of Descriptions of Sibling Relationship in State Photolistings

Reihonna L. Fros & Edie F. Goldberg

Abstract

Among the adoptable children in US foster care, some are listed as part of a sibling group and many more are listed as individuals, with recommendations for continued contact with biological siblings. The Foster Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act mandates agencies to prepare descriptions of adoptable siblings together whenever possible; however, there are many barriers to accomplishing this goal including difficulties in recruiting adoptive parents who are willing to adopt multiple children at the same time (Wald, 2014). No known research explores how sibling relationships and possible sibling groups are described in presented recruitment materials. The current qualitative study aims to address this gap by exploring the ways in which siblings and sibling relationships are discussed in state photolistings of adoptable children in foster care. Analysis focuses on the profiles of adoptable children listed in photolistings from New York, Illinois, Florida, and Arizona, representing each of the four major regions of the United States (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Findings indicate that there is wide variation in how sibling relationships are discussed in the photolisting descriptions, and how they are maintained or communicated to potential adopters.

Introduction

There are 100,000 adoptable children in foster care in the US at any given time (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015), and of these, an estimated 25% are listed for adoption as part of a sibling group (McKay & Ayers-Lopez, 2014). Still, it is evident that even more sibling relationships exist among children who are not listed together because an estimated 65% of children in foster care have at least one other sibling in care (Hague, 2005). While keeping siblings together in adoptive placements is a goal, barrier to this goal persists, including adoptive parent’s reluctance to adopt multiple children at the same time (Wald, 2014). No known research has focused on how adoptive families are recruited for sibling groups or how different types of sibling relationships are described in photolisting, or how to best communicate these sibling relationships to interested adoptive families.

AdoptUSKids, an organization funded through the Children’s Bureau to support recruitments for single children, created a guide for improving photolisting of adoptable children (AdoptUSKids, n.d.). It emphasized that the goal of photolisting should be to “interest families and help them feel a connection to the child, so they move forward in learning more about adoption.” Further, this work encouraged social workers to write photolisting descriptions that can help adoptive families imagine ways that they might be able to help each other. That is, these listings used elaboration to describe in ways that they help each other. This study seeks to explore the types of sibling relationships that are described in siblings’ photolisting, and how these descriptions are used to encourage potential adopters to consider these sibling relationships.

Results

In this study, we examined photolisting descriptions of 1214 adoptable children. We coded these photolisting with qualitative content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and used Nvivo, the software package, to analyze them. The coding process is ongoing, and we have not yet come to an exhaustive list of codes, but as we continue to analyze the photolisting, we are discovering new ways that sibling relationships can be described.

Table 1: Types of Sibling Content, by Listing Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Sibling Content</th>
<th>Listing Type</th>
<th>Total Sample (n=1214)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sibling Group</td>
<td>Photolisting</td>
<td>1214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Photolisting</td>
<td>1060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Child Reasons to Maintain Contact

For some listings, children’s descriptions were presented as both on the basis of needs of the child and based on the relationship that is important to them. For example, “[Child]’s relationship with his brother is very important to him and will need to be maintained.” For others, that the “relationship is very important in the child’s life.” While these descriptions were included in the photolisting, it was not specified if the relationship would be beneficial. For instance, “[Child] and her sister have been through a lot together and it is important for them to maintain this relationship.” “[Child] loves to play with her siblings and she loves to help them with their homework.” Still other listings identify the choice to maintain contact as based on the request of the child, such as “[Child] requests to maintain contact with any type of family as long as she can stay in touch with his siblings!”

In these types of postings, the recommendations for ongoing contact are coupled with descriptions of how the child interacts with family members and maintains relationships, and with information about the relationship needs of the child. In some cases, they also provide ideas about the benefits of such a relationship. In addition, these more elaborate postings sometimes included the contact recommendations to other information about child’s interpersonal style or behavior, allowing the posting to represent more than the child.

Sibling Relationship Content

In addition to mentioning contact planning for the future, some listings (n=144) provided elaborated descriptions of the relationships siblings. Descriptions of sibling relationships occurred both in sibling listings (n=1) and in single listings (n=50). How these descriptions were used in context varied considerably, with different types of relationship content shared.

Visitation Descriptions

Sibling relationships were often elaborated on when describing the child’s current visitation plans. For instance, “[Child] is a sibling as a sibling group has some regularly scheduled visitation with a sibling, this was mentioned. Often, this visitation was described in detail, as “[Child] meets with her brother at [home].” “[Child] has monthly visits with her sister who is in a separate placement.” When these siblings were not listed together, some photolists elaborated on the reason for the relationship’s importance. For instance, “[Child] is very close to his brothers and sisters, who he has already been adopted by.” “[Child] enjoys regular contact with his sister, who he cannot be placed with.” Other descriptions were placed with recommendations for future contact. “[Children] visit with their two brothers regularly and travel visits will need to continue after placement.”

When visitations were described in sibling group listings, these statements indicated where the siblings currently lived together or how often they visited each other. In addition, these types of listings included descriptions of visits with other siblings as appropriate, for example “[Child] interacted well in a family of any constellation, with or without other children in the household.”

In some cases, descriptions of sibling visitations served to demonstrate important relationships in the life of the child or children. Further, these descriptions provide information about the types of experiences the child currently has in foster care.

Sibling Interactions

A minority of posts included descriptions of sibling interactions that went beyond descriptions of visitations or contact plans. While many listings included discussions of activities that children enjoy together, qualities they share or ways they interact, they often did not. These listings used elaboration to describe what was important about the sibling relationship- or how the relationship functioned in the life of the child. For example, “[Child] enjoys reading to her siblings and helps with their homework.” Other listings included descriptions of the sibling relationship to highlight characteristics about the child’s personality or the ways that the child behaves in a family. For instance, “[Child] and her sister enjoy being active together and visiting the park.”

These descriptions were present in single listings and sibling group listings, but were most commonly present in sibling group listings. While only a small number of sibling listings grouped descriptions gave no indication of the type of sibling relationship shared by the group. This may make it difficult for a prospective adoptive family to imagine how the children would be as members of their family.

For some sibling group listings, this type of description of the group made up the majority of the listing, with little or no discussion of the children as individuals. Interestingly, there was a subset of sibling group listings that did not mention sibling relationships at all and focused only on describing them as individual children. Within this subset, a few listings described sibling group descriptions gave no indication of the type of sibling relationship shared by the group. For some sibling group listings, this type of description of the group made up the majority of the listing, with little or no discussion of the children as individuals. Interestingly, there was a subset of sibling group listings that did not mention sibling relationships at all and focused only on describing them as individual children. Within this subset, a few listings described sibling group relationships.

Prospective Sibling Recommendations

Interestingly, many photolists (n=237) made suggestions about the preferred family configuration for adoption, including sibling groups. Many listings specified that homes without other children would be preferable for the adopter. For example, “[Child] would do best in a family where she is the youngest or only child within the family.” While other listings recommended that “[Child] do well in a family of any constellation, with or without other children in the home.” There were also listings that stated a preference for placing the child with other children, usually because this was seen as important to the child. For example, “She would do best in a home where she has older siblings as she enjoys being with older children.” The prevalence of these types of recommendations makes it clear that children’s interactions with other children as seen as important predictors of their success in a new family.

Conclusion

While many photolists of single children do mention siblings in their life, a minority of the listings use these relationships to enhance the description of the listed child in a way that helps a potential adopter to view them as a member of a family. Further, sibling group listings often missed the opportunity to elaborate on sibling relationship characteristics in ways that could motivate adopters to keep siblings together. From the minority of photolisting that did use these tactics, it is clear that siblings’ photolists have the potential to be used to illustrate their ability to make and maintain closer relationships. Further, sibling relationship characteristics may be described in ways that emphasize the importance of keeping siblings together in adoption.

References


Special thanks to Mary Feyman and Alex Frost-Calthoum for help with data collection, technical support and coding.