

Where is the scholarly literature regarding foster children and religion?

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Abstract

This article questions the scarcity of scholarly literature regarding children in foster care and religion as a single combined endeavor of research. A literature review of academic and scholarly databases in psychology, social work, and law reveals very few publications regarding this topic.

A week from now, the United States Supreme Court will soon be hearing *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, a case concerning whether faith-based child welfare organizations can reject LGBTQ families as foster parents. Against this backdrop, a literature review of ‘foster care and religion’ as a single phrase displays a notable lack of scholarly articles. This is in contradistinction to an abundance of contemporaneous literature regarding other aspects of foster care. For instance:

- Education and foster care includes, “Maximizing educational achievement of youth in foster care and alumni,” (Pecora, 2012); “Readiness for college

engagement among students who have aged out of foster care” (Unrau, Font & Rawls, 2012); and, “An examination of post-secondary retention and graduation among foster care youth enrolled in a four-year university,” (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty & Damashek, 2011).

- Research on mental health and foster care includes, “Better futures: A randomized field test of a model for supporting young people in foster care with mental health challenges to participate in higher education,” (Geenen, Powers, Phillips, Nelson, Mckenna, Wings-Yanez & Swank, 2014); “Mental and physical health of children in foster care,” (Turney & Wildeman, 2016); and, “Mental health interventions for children in foster care: A systematic review,” (Hambrick, Oppenheim-Weller, Nzi, & Taussig, 2016).
- Publications on health and foster care include, “Health care issues for children and adolescents in foster care and kinship care,” (Szilagyi, Rosen, Rubin, & Zlotnik, 2015), “Social, health, and demographic predictors of high healthcare cost for children in foster care,” (Hodges, Zetley, Haberlein, Zhang, Simpson, & Havens, 2019); and “Developing a health care system for children in foster care,” (Greiner & Beal, 2017).
- Literature on crime and foster care includes, “Juvenile offending and crime in early adulthood: A large sample analysis,” (Barrett & Katsiyannis, 2015);

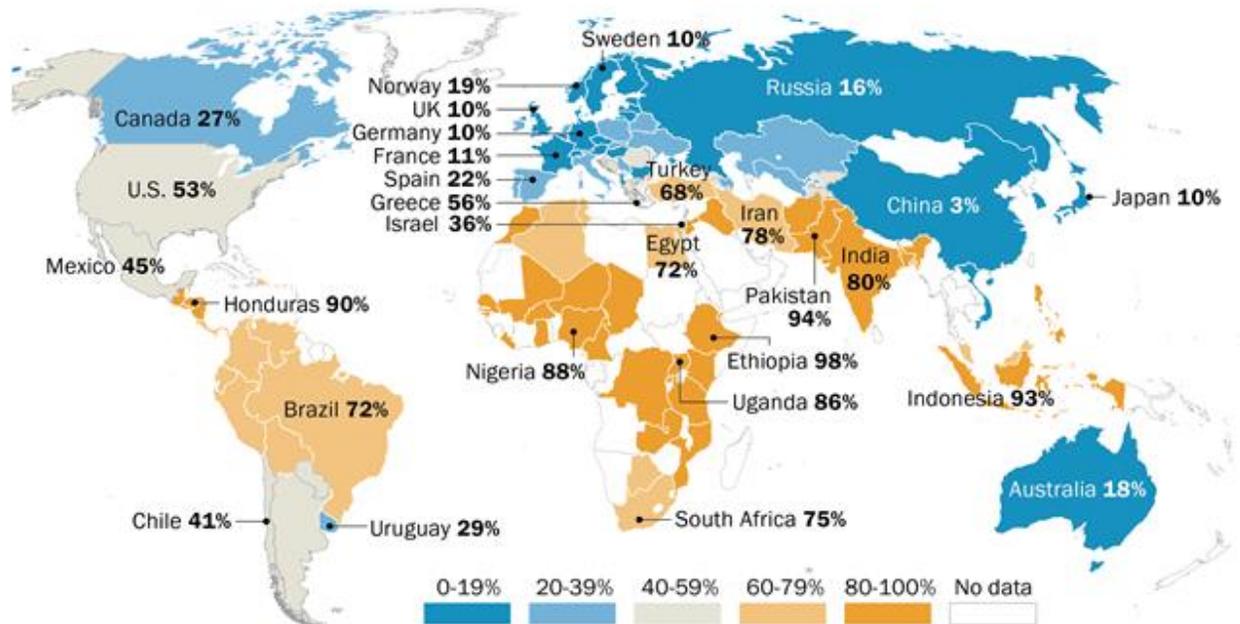
and, “Foster care beyond placement: Offending outcomes in emerging adulthood” (Yang, Mccuish, & Corrado, 2017). There is also an abundance of literature on religion in general including “*The psychology of religion: an empirical approach,*” (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2018); *On religion* (Caputo, 2019); and, “*New Age religion and Western culture: Esotericism in the mirror of secular thought*” (Hanegraaff, 2018).

Why such a scarcity of literature?

Naturally, the literature regarding the importance of religion in general is robust. A recent Pew Research Center graphic highlights the percentage of adults around the world who say that religion is very important in their lives:

People in Europe and East Asia say religion is not very important to them

% who say religion is very important in their lives



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2008 to 2017.
"The Age Gap in Religion Around the World"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Hackett, C., Kramer, S., & Schiller, A. (June 13, 2018). *The Age Gap in Religion Around the World* (June 13, 2018). Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/how-religious-commitment-varies-by-country-among-people-of-all-ages/>

Of note, 53% of American adults say religion is very important in their lives. Not surprisingly, the literature regarding the importance of religion to children is not as thorough or conclusive.

Literature Review

A literature review of religion and foster children as a single phrase (in three permutations) reveals the following:

Religion and Foster Children			
<i>Author, Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Belanger, Copeland, & Cheung, 2008	The role of faith in adoption: Achieving positive adoption outcomes for African American children	Faith is linked to African American foster parents who have higher percentages of faith connections than white parents	Mainly focused on disproportionality of black youth in the system
Collins & Scott, 2019	Intersection of religion and race: Examining policy and practice	Discusses religion only in the context of black youth in foster care -states that if anything, literature on religion references Christianity	Mainly focused on disproportionality of black youth in the system
Jackson et al., 2010	Exploring spirituality among youth in foster care: findings from the Casey Field Office Mental Health Study.	-Explores the spiritual lives of adolescents in foster care ages 14-17 -95% believe in G-d -79% consider prayer a spiritual practice -Spirituality is important to help youths through trauma and with resilience	
Scott Jr. et al., 2006	Religious involvement and its association to risk behaviors among older youth in foster care	Religious affiliation linked with reduced sexual behaviors in older youth	- In Missouri -focused on church attendance (catholic protestant “other” or none)

Religion and Foster Parents			
<i>Author, Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Hook et al., 2017	Replanted: Offering support for adoptive	-Replanted is a faith-based ministry	-Review of journal articles in the Journal

	and foster care families	providing support for current and future foster care parents -Lack of faith-based resources and research, particularly since caring for orphans is a Christian value	of Psychology and Christianity, the Journal of Psychology and Theology, and Psychology of Religion and Spirituality shows only three articles related to care
Howell-Moroney M., 2013	Faith-based partnerships and foster parent satisfaction.	Recruitment of foster care parents from churches provide additional support and helps parents complete the process	
Schatz & Horejsi, 1996	The importance of religious tolerance: A module for educating foster parents	-Training program for foster parents who may have different religious beliefs than children	-Foster parents report that at licensure they are asked few questions about religious or spiritual beliefs concluding that its an off bounds topic

Foster Care, Religion, and Case Law			
Cunningham, T. J., 1994	Considering religion as a factor in foster care in the aftermath of Employment Division, Department of Human Resources v. Smith and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act	-Religion must be considered if important to parent/ child -Discusses case law regarding child rights -Children twelve and up is categorized differently than children eight and below -State has an interest too	-Addresses religious freedom when in conflict with the law (the law upholds) -Cites case law in Orzechowski

			Yoder Prince
Guggenheim, M., 1990	State-supported foster care: The interplay between the prohibition of establishing religion and the Free Exercise rights of parents and children: Wilder v. Bernstein <i>The Second Circuit Review--1988-1989 Term: First Amendment</i>	-Law discusses placement "of the same religious persuasion of the child" - Differentiates between circumstances of fostering and adoption -Cites Wilder litigation of Protestant children left behind -He believes that the state owes the parent the right to religious choice -However, sectarian agencies do not have the right to deny children out of their religion	-Ultimately, children have rights in Wilder
Horowitz, G., 1989	Accommodation and neutrality under the Establishment Clause: The foster care challenge	-Government must be neutral yet sensitive with regards to religion	-Discusses the First Amendment Establishment Clause prohibiting government from establishing or favoring any religion

Conclusion

Have researchers simply not gotten around to studying this area? Is it of little interest? Is there some unconscious bias? Despite the historic importance of religion on the lives of young children, there is a decided lack of literature regarding foster care and religion. This shortage means we do not have a truly comprehensive perspective of the lives of foster care children.

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