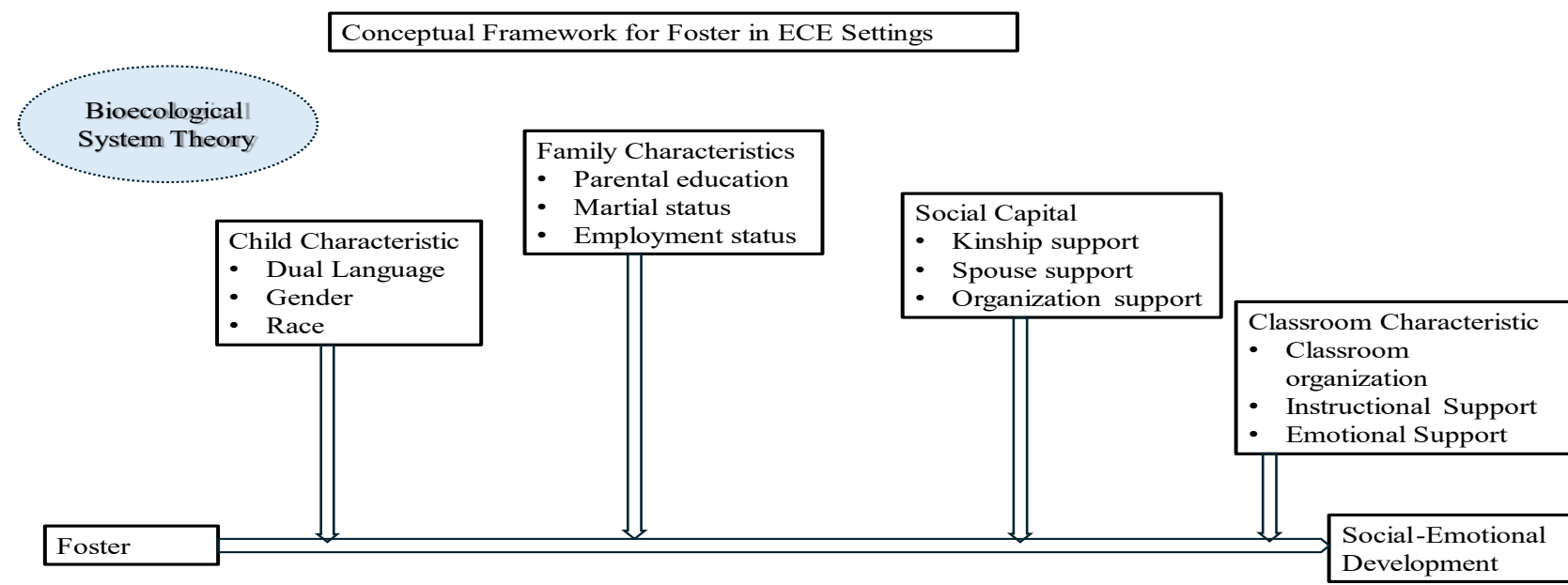


The Risk Factors Associated with Foster Care in Early Care and Education Settings: Protective Factors for Their Social Behavior Outcomes

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Introduction

Early Care and Education (ECE) Services and Foster interventions mitigate negative child development outcomes for children experiencing adversity, neglect, and abuse (Humphrey et al., 2022; Yazejian, et al., 2013). Foster children experience family placement instabilities, low academic achievement, homelessness, school dropout, school absenteeism, and racial disparities (Courtney et al., 2004; Elad et. al., 2023). In the Context of foster, a bioecological model was applied for this study since proximal processes exert more pressure on child developmental outcomes than contextual factors (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015). The proximal process in our model relates to child characteristics, classroom quality, and family and social support as contextual variables. Fostering is associated with negative social and emotional development outcomes (Jacobsen et al., 2020). **There is a gap in evidence on the differences and protective factors between foster and non-foster in ECE settings.**



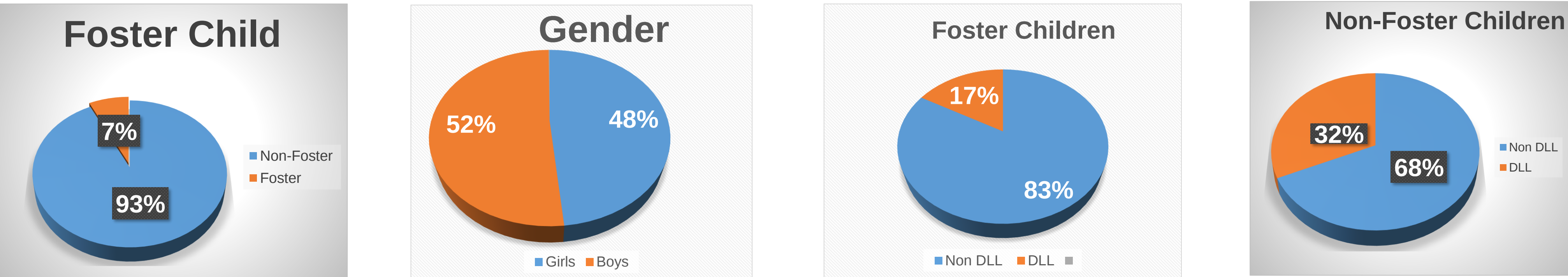
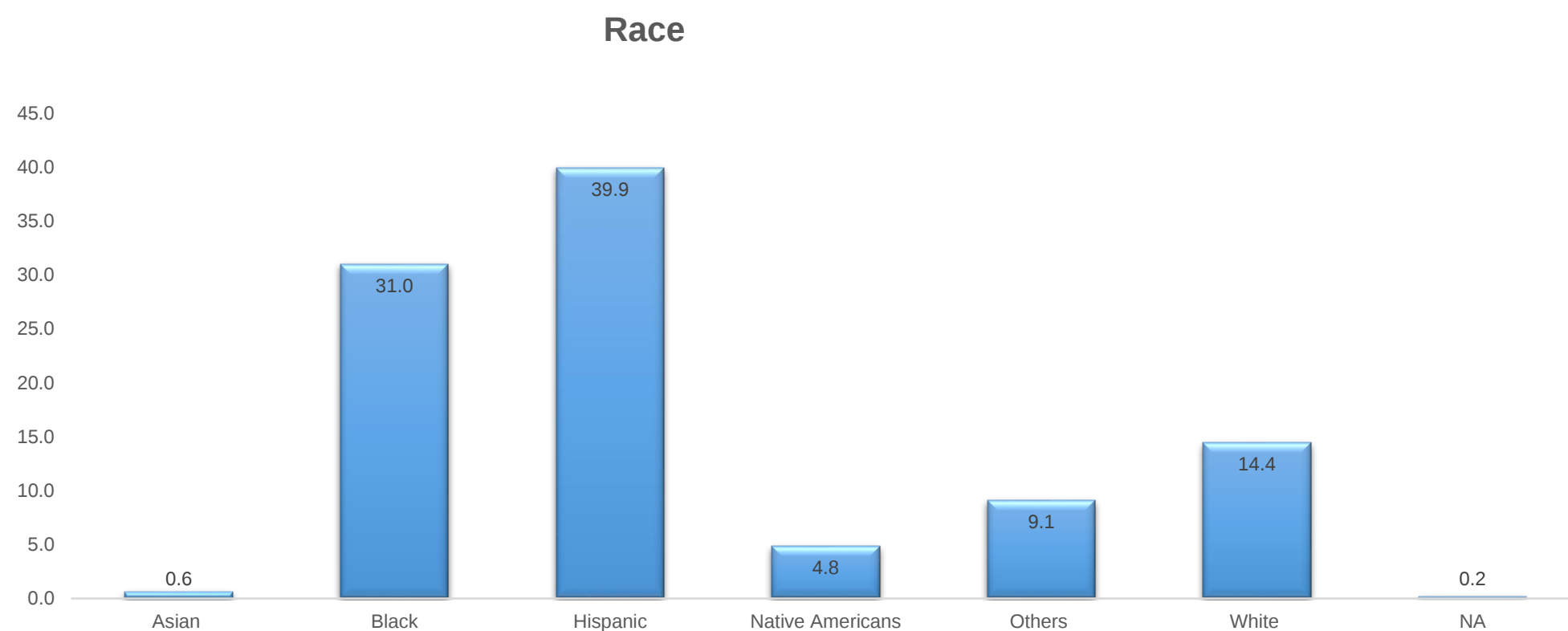
Research Questions

- 1) Do foster and non-foster children differ in social-emotional behaviors within ECE settings?
- 2) What protective factors could mitigate risks associated with fostering in ECE settings?

Methods

Participants

This study used a longitudinal dataset comprising 3,658 children of families living in a low-resource context in a Midwest State, collected from 2007 to 2020 with a mean age of 28.38 months (SD=15.60).



Measures

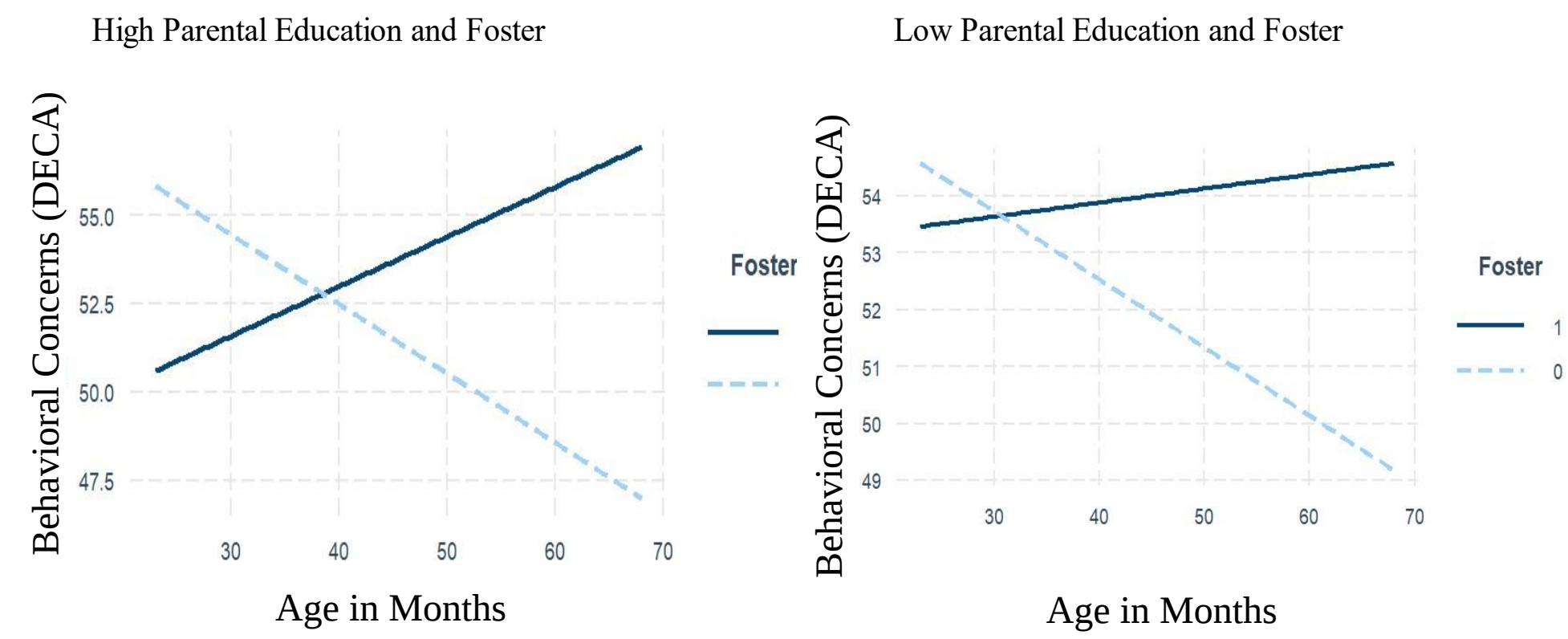
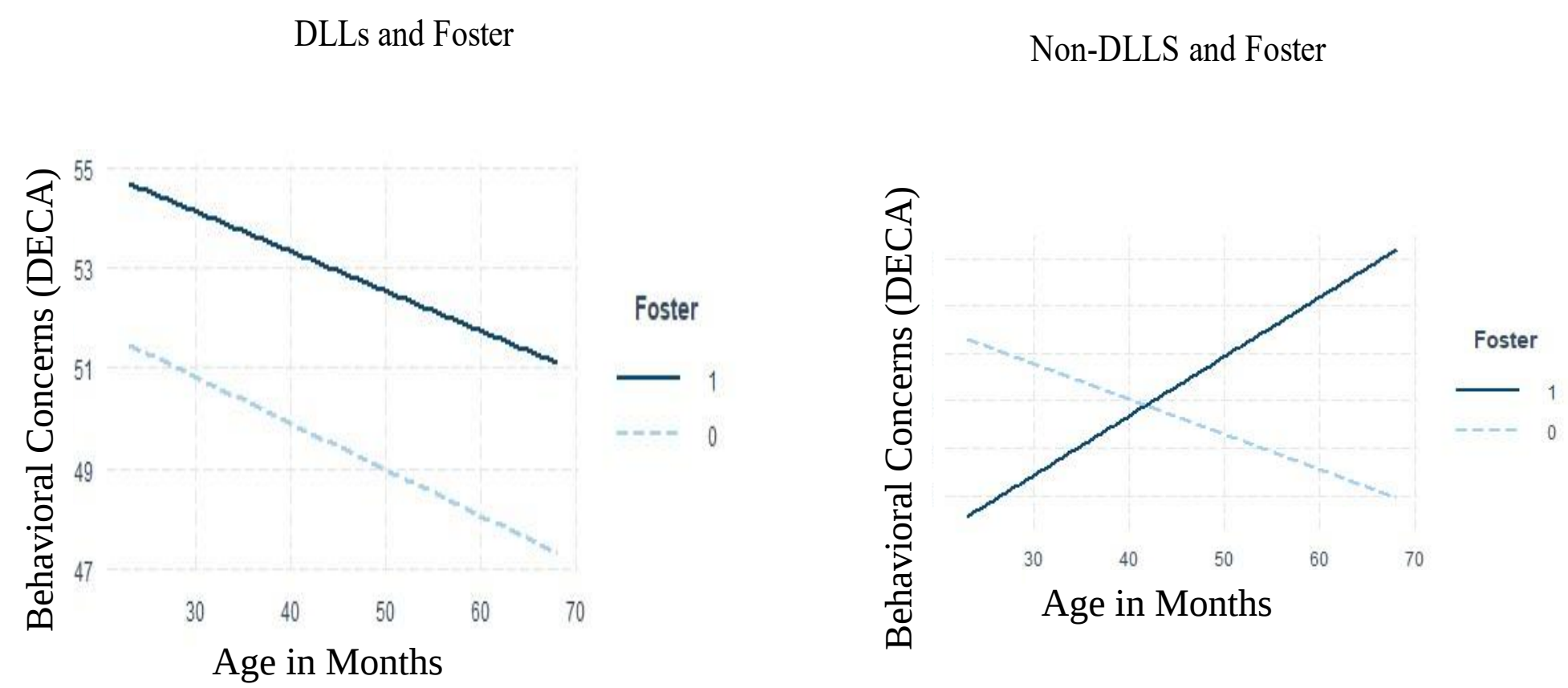
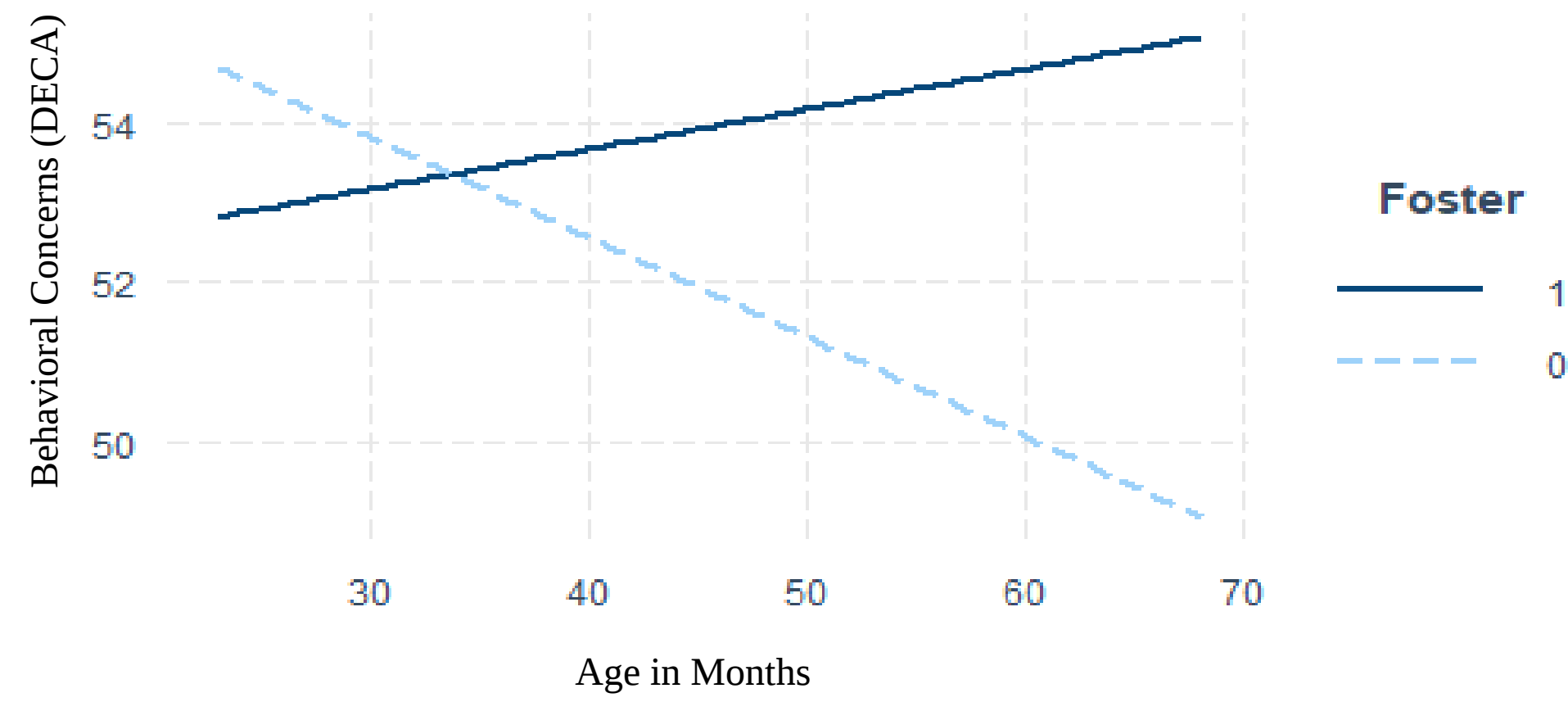
- Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA; LeBuffe & Naglieri, 1999) assessed Social-emotional development
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2008) Classroom quality
- A Family Support Scale (FSS) was used to collect data on family support systems (Dunst, et al., 1984)

Procedures

There were 4 sites for children enrolled in Early/Head Start. Children's social-emotional development was rated by teachers each fall and spring within 5 to 10 minutes and 33-38 items in length. The CLASS Pre-K was administered to each preschool at each site which assesses the classroom quality through teacher-child interactions observations during the classroom activities. The observations last for 2 hours made up of four 30-minute cycles of which 20 minutes are used for observation and 10 minutes for scoring in winter. Parents provided options and multiple answers for ticking the responses from the parents lasted for about 30 minutes and was conducted with each parent on enrolment into the program once every year including family support and family-related measures. We utilized two-level multilevel models with linear growth curves to account for individual variations and variations among children over time.

Results

- Findings revealed a disparity in social-emotional behaviors between foster and non-foster children, with foster children exhibiting more behavioral concerns (B=0.12, SE=0.05, p<.001).
- DLL status served as a protective factor, reducing the gap in social-emotional growth between foster and non-foster children, resulting in non-DLL foster children displaying higher behavioral concerns (B=-0.24, SE=0.12, p<.05)
- Neither classroom quality (B = -0.07, SE = 0.09, p > .05) nor foster parental education (B = 4.75, SE = 2.78, p > .05) protected foster social-emotional growth disparities.
- Finally, neither partner/spouse support (B=-0.07, SE=0.12, p>.05) nor kinship support (B=0.14, SE=0.19, p>.05) does not necessarily protect foster children from negative social-emotional outcomes.



Discussion and Implication

Our study shows that foster children enrolled in high-quality ECE programs exhibited higher behavioral concerns compared to non-foster children. These results contrast with previous research attributing better social-emotional outcomes to high-quality ECE settings and Foster accessing ECE interventions (Burchinal et al., 2008; Lee, 2022, 2023).

Foster children suffer tragedies of poverty and family separations that affect their development thus a need for toiled professional development to enhance teacher-child interactions such as targeted professional development opportunities to better assess and address the behavioral concerns of foster children and facilitate timely interventions.

Foster children are likely to risk classroom exclusion associated with school absenteeism, low achievement gap, school drop, and the long-term effect of homeliness (Courtney et al., 2004; Elad et. al., 2023). Future research is thus needed to untangle inconsistent findings and expand understanding of foster development within ECE contexts.

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