



Motivation for foster care



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ABSTRACT

In 2011 in Flanders 3641 foster parents realized 6371 foster placements.

Foster parents have many reasons to become a foster parent. Beside child-centered reasons, self-oriented and society-oriented reasons also play a role.

This research examined the motivations of 192 Flemish non-kinship foster parents to become a foster parent. A Dutch version of 'Reasons for fostering inventory' was used. The checklist contains 24 items and three scales: child-centered reasons, self-oriented reasons and society-oriented reasons. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 4-pointscale if the item represented the reason why they wanted to be foster parents.

Flemish foster parents' main reasons for fostering tended to be child-centered. They endorsed significantly more child-centered reasons than self-oriented and society-oriented reasons ($F(2) = 399.737, p < .005$). For 34.4% of foster parents the reason 'I want to provide a good home for a child' is the best description. Retention in foster care can't be explained by the three categories of reasons for fostering, only age was associated with retention. Only self-oriented reasons for fostering can be explained by familial characteristics, more specific by available time.

In conclusion, Flemish foster parents mainly have child-centered reasons to become a foster parent.

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1. Introduction

In 2011, in Flanders 3641 foster parents realized 6371 foster placements (Pleegzorg Vlaanderen, 2012). Each year the total number of foster placements increases. Unfortunately, the total number of foster parents does not increase at the same rate, moreover 57% of foster parents quit within five years from fostering (Pleegzorg Vlaanderen, 2012).

The goal of this study is to provide information for the foster care services about the motivations of foster parents in order to select more foster parents to meet the growing need. Rhodes, Cox, Orme, and Coakley (2006) underline that a careful assessment of reasons for fostering can help to identify parents with 'high foster care potential'. The motivations that influence Flemish foster parents to enroll and stay in foster care are not known.

Earlier research has shown the importance of knowing foster parent motivations (Tyebee, 2003), since they predict the success of a foster placement (Baum, Crase, & Crase, 2001; Buehler, Cox, & Cuddeback, 2003), the total number of children fostered (Rhodes, Cox, Orme, & Coakley, 2006), the number of years fostered (Rhodes, Cox, Orme, & Coakley, 2006) and the development of secure attachments (Cole, 2005).

First, for a better understanding of our results, we briefly describe the organization of foster care in Flanders. Next we review the research regarding motivation for fostering and formulate the research questions. Finally we report and discuss the results.

1.1. Foster care in Flanders

In Flanders, when children are in need of out-of-home care, foster care is increasingly the first option of choice. In 2012 foster placements made up 42.33% of all the out-of-home services (e.g., group homes, family homes, family foster care) (Agentschap Jongerenwelzijn, 2012).

Seventeen foster care agencies are responsible by law for the selection and pre-service training of foster parents, the ongoing support for foster parents and the monitoring of the foster placement (Besluit van de Vlaamse regering inzake de erkenningsvoorwaarden en de subsidiën voor de voorzieningen van de bijzondere jeugdbijstand, 1994).

Legally, Flemish aspirant foster parents have to meet three criteria: be older than 18 years, be in good health and have a Police Clearance Certificate. In addition almost all foster care agencies use some 'excluding' criteria as having a stable relationship, the last year did not experienced a big life time change, not being pregnant or waiting for adoption, having a positive motivation, etcetera. Those criteria are based on experience and on what the foster care workers think is good practice (De Maeyer, Klingels, Vanderfaeillie, & Van Hoen,

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2012). All Flemish foster care agencies consider the five *Samenwerking Teamgeest Aspirant Pleegouders* (STAP) competencies as important required skills and competencies as well: i.e. being able to communicate openly and clearly, being able to collaborate in a team and share parenthood, being capable of helping children in changing their behaviors and in developing a positive self-image and being aware of the impact that fostering might have on their own family life (Pleegzorg Vlaanderen, 2010). As part of the selection procedure, non-kinship foster parents have to complete a pre-service training. Most foster care agencies use a modified version of the STAP program, which is similar to the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) (De Maeyer, Klingels, et al., 2012; Mayers-Passtor, 1987), during which following topics are discussed in individual and group sessions: motivation to foster, collaboration, attachment, challenging behaviors of foster children, parenting skills and the impact of foster care on the foster family. A team of selection foster care workers use the legal criteria, the STAP competencies and the topics discussed in the individual and group sessions to substantiate their decision whether aspirant foster parents can become foster parents (De Maeyer, Klingels, et al., 2012).

Although foster parents are considered volunteers, they receive a daily expense allowance (in 2012, €13), independent on the child's need and foster family income. While foster parents are foremost parents who are taking care of someone else's child, Flemish foster parents are more and more considered to be paraprofessionals as well (helping parents, being an active member of the foster care agency, etcetera). Until now foster care was seen as a temporary intervention with reunification as the goal. The concept of permanence and growing to adoption is in Flanders unknown. Recently voices are raised for permanency, in order to offer continuity to foster children with respect to the child needs of safety and stability (Vanderfaellie, Van Holen & Vanschoonlandt, 2012).

1.2. Motivation for fostering

Kinship foster parents' motives are different from the motives of non-kinship foster parents (Vandezande, Bronselaer, & Verreth, 2011). Mainly kinship foster parents choose to foster a particular child or become foster parents because they want to keep children within the kinship network (Cole, 2005; Rhodes, Cox, Orme, & Coakley, 2006). Since there is a difference in motives, we will only consider non-kinship foster parents further on.

Why people become foster parents can be explained by the resource theory (Cox, Orme, & Rhodes, 2003). A resource is 'anything one individual family member can offer another to help that person satisfy needs or attain goals' (Hesse-Biber & Williamson, 1984, in Cox et al., 2003). The more resources possessed by a person, the more likely they are to be given to others (Foa and Foa, 1974 in Cox et al., 2003). Therefore families with more resources (higher education, higher income, being married, having time, having parenting experience, having social support and working in a helping profession) are more likely to start fostering.

Foster parents report multiple reasons to become a foster parent, American families had, on average 6.6 ($sd = 2.8$) reasons for fostering (Rhodes, Cox, Orme, & Coakley, 2006). In literature these reasons are clustered in different ways. Rodger, Cummings, and Leschied (2006) for example distinguished intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivations come from within the individual, such as a values, standards and personal traits. Motivations driven by an anticipated reward or by the fulfillment of expectations from others are called extrinsic motivations. In addition, Rhodes, Cox, Orme, and Coakley (2006) consider two other categories: child-centered and self-oriented reasons. Child-centered reasons focus on the child's needs. Self-oriented reasons are centered on the foster parents' needs. Finally, Tyebjee (2003) and Sebba (2012) described three sets of motivations. The first group consists of child-centered reasons. The second group focuses on how foster care affects the individual (e.g. adding meaning to life, fulfilling beliefs,

being a parent, etcetera). The third group of motivations is related to the wider society and environment and can be called the society-oriented reasons (doing something for the community, fulfilling beliefs). Some reasons can easily be allocated to one of combined categories (intrinsic, extrinsic, child-centered, self-oriented, society-oriented), others are harder to cluster. In research it is not always clear which clustering is used (Orme, Cuddeback, Buehler, Cox, & Le Prohn, 2006).

Most American foster parents reported child-centered reasons: wanting to help a child, wanting to provide a child with love and a good home, wanting to provide a home to a child who would otherwise be in an institution and so on (Broady, Stoyles, McMullan, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2010; Rhodes, Cox, Orme, & Coakley, 2006). Baum et al. (2001) found that 14.6% of their respondents endorsed intrinsic motivations as influential to their decision to become a foster parent. Rodger et al. (2006) found two intrinsic reasons as most endorsed. According to them, foster parents want to be loving parents and want to save the children from further harm.

In a few cases foster parents are driven by the extrinsic motivation 'wanting to increase the family income' (Rodger et al., 2006; Vandezande et al., 2011). In Flanders, little money can be gained with foster care, so few individuals are fostering because of that reason. Nevertheless, Flemish foster parents tend to quit fostering when the costs of foster care are too high (Vandezande et al., 2011).

Twenty-five percent of the American foster parents give self-oriented reasons, such as wanting to enlarge the family, wanting to parent after own children were grown (Rhodes, Cox, Orme, & Coakley, 2006). Some foster parents chose to foster because they could not have children of their own (Cole, 2005). Around 50% of the American foster parents believe foster care is a way to do something for the community (Rhodes, Cox, Orme, & Coakley, 2006).

Research has pointed out the importance of knowing the motivations for fostering (Tyebjee, 2003). Motivations to foster arise from a person's theories about how life is and how life should be. In life's many experiences, one's theory is put to the test. If the foster care experience corresponds to that theory, there is no problem and the foster care experience is most likely to be good. Otherwise, when it doesn't correspond, foster parents can adjust their theory or quit fostering (Broady et al., 2010). As a result, motivations to foster are important to investigate when aspirant foster parents are applying for fostering. The reality of the foster care task and the expectations of the person (theory of life and his/her motives) are critical in the person staying in foster care (Sebba, 2012).

Research found intrinsic, child-centered and self-oriented reasons were associated with positive outcomes. For example foster parents with intrinsic motivations such as 'wanting to be a loving foster parent' and 'saving children from further harm', were more likely to continue fostering (Rodger et al., 2006). Kraus (1971, in Rhodes, Cox, Orme, & Coakley, 2006) found a positive relation between child-centered reasons and placement duration. Self-oriented reasons such as 'inability to have children of their own' and 'ability to identify with the child because of own experience of childhood deprivation' were related to positive outcomes for foster children (Dando & Minty, 1987, in Cole, 2005). Also the desire to increase family size, a self-oriented reason, is a significant predictor for a secure attachment relationship between foster parent and foster child (Cole, 2005). In addition, foster care workers gave foster parents with reasons as altruism (child- and society-oriented), being childless and identifying with the child (both self-oriented) a high performance rating (Cole, 2005). Families who endorsed 'wanted to help a child with special problems' had more foster children in their home at the time of survey. Families who endorsed 'wanted to provide a home for children who would otherwise be in an institution' had fostered longer than foster families who did not endorse that reason (Rhodes, Cox, Orme, & Coakley, 2006). Finally, Denby, Rindlfeisch, and Bean (1999) noted that the child-centered reason 'wanting to take in children who needed loving parents' was a good predictor for foster parent satisfaction and the likelihood of continuing to foster.

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