

# SUPPORT REGARDING STAKEHOLDERS (III)

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## Nº19 – Foster parents coping with ethically difficult situation: how do they refer to relatives, other foster families and professionals?

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### Context

Foster parenting is a complex role. One way to approach this complexity is to consider the foster parents' dual role as both parents and professionals, as foster parents may experience a conflict between the two roles. For example: what attitude (parental or professional) should they adopt with the foster child? How long should the placement be maintained when the child's difficulties strongly impact the family? To what extent should they disclose their intimacy and difficulties to stakeholders? These questions can lead to discomfort among foster parents; in the long run, they may question their commitment, which constitutes a threat to the stability of the placement. However, the literature reveals that how foster parents cope with these conflicts is poorly documented (DeWilde et al., 2019). This presentation is based on a doctoral study that examines this issue, proposing that role conflicts could generate ethically difficult situations, as they lead to day-to-day decisions that impact many people, primarily the child in care.

### Objectives

The objectives of the thesis are to *identify the ethically difficult situations faced by foster parents* and to *better understand how they deal with these situations (their ethical reasoning), using virtue ethics as a theoretical framework*.

### Method

A thematic content analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) was conducted based on material collected through individual semi-structured interviews with 19 foster parents.

## Results

During the interviews, three ethically difficult situations could be identified. The first concerns the position vis-à-vis the biological parents; the second concerns the working relationship with the stakeholders, particularly when disagreements arise; and the third concerns the decision to request (or not) the removal of the child when the behaviors endanger the balance of the family. The presentation will provide an overview of these situations. The focus will then shift to how foster parents deal with these situations, and how virtue ethics might provide them interesting tools to do so. The way they are using their support network will also be addressed, namely: the importance of 1) having a personal network that understands the ins and outs of foster care, 2) having spaces for discussion with stakeholders outside of quality control structures, and 3) having opportunities for exchange and mentoring with other foster parents.

## Conclusion / Recommendations

This presentation offers an original look at the experience of foster parents. Based on this new understanding, the following actions should be taken to help foster parents overcome situations that may cause them ethical suffering:

- Create opportunities for foster parents to reflect together on how to approach these complex ethical issues (support groups, mentoring, training).
- Establish discussion forums outside of the quality control structure to develop a common understanding of the role of foster parent.
- Provide professional support that addresses the child's needs, but also the impact of placement on the family system.

## Citations

Banks,S.(2005). Accounting for Ethical Difficulties in Social Welfare Work:Issues, Problems and Dilemmas. *British Journal of Social Work*, 35(7), 1005-1022.

Braun,V. & Clarke,V.(2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

DeWilde, L., Devlieghere, J., Vandenbroeck.M. & Vanobbergen, B.(2019). Foster parents between voluntarism and professionalisation: unpacking the backpack. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 98, 290-296.

### Topic Areas

Child protection systems: Protection services, policy and legislation.

## Nº35 – An evaluation of child protective system professionals’ trans inclusive behavior

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LGBTQIA+ youth has been found to be disproportionately represented in child welfare settings, and there is particularly lacking information regarding trans youth in these services. What information is known has shown that a non-affirmative environment can have detrimental effects for trans youth in out of home care, considering the experiences of rejection, bullying or violence based on their identity they oftentimes experience.

Preliminary results in the FIRMUS project (Spain) have shown child welfare professionals’ willingness to create safe and affirming spaces for LGBTQIA youth; however, expressed attitudes don’t always amount to concrete actions. Therefore, the focus of this study is to explore the professional intervention of practitioners who work with trans youth in child welfare settings.

### Objectives

This study aims to analyze the concrete actions taken by professionals in out-of-home care settings, that are aimed at creating inclusive environments for trans youth.

### Method

An online, Spanish version of the Trans Inclusive Behavior Scale (TIBS) was sent to professionals working in the child protection system in Cantabria (North of Spain). This instrument consists of 15 items with Likert style responses, which address the frequency with which trans inclusive behaviors are undertaken. In total, 80 responses were obtained, however, 10 were removed due to being highly incomplete.

## Results

Overall, the findings indicate that professionals working with youth placed in out-of-home care are relatively unlikely to engage in trans inclusive behaviors, as the highest score obtained was 58, out of a possible 75 ( $\bar{x}$ = 33.1 and  $s$ =11.48). Though women had a higher average score in the TIBS when compared to men, ( $\bar{x}$ = 34.98,  $\bar{x}$ = 29.70, respectively), this difference was not statistically significant (Mann-Whitney  $U$ = 415.00,  $p$ =0.70). Additional analyses with regards to respondent's age, length of time working with youth, as well as and contact with LGBT individuals in their daily lives, were also included.

## Conclusion

Overall, professionals' express commitment towards creating inclusive environments, as well as generally positive attitudes towards trans youth. However, it appears they are either unable to take or are unaware of the measures necessary to foster affirmative care spaces.

Professionals cannot guarantee safe environments towards trans youth in out-of-home placements if they don't have the proper tools to do so. As such, more training is required with regards to daily actions they could undertake. Additionally, proper guidelines need to be created and shared with all professionals working in residential care or supporting foster families. Trained professionals could then share these measures with foster families of trans youth. Demographic variables appear to have little impact on this requirement, as room for improvement has been shown irrespective of these characteristics.

## Nº29 – Foster care girls: The social capital as empowerment resource against male chauvinist violence and other kinds of vulnerabilities

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Young women in foster care are a group of people whose specific social and educational needs, as well as their social and emotional needs, are little investigated, as there is limited research focused on their reality, even more so from a feminist perspective. A remarkable element of the general foster care population is the lack of a supportive and consistent social network (Bravo Arteaga & Fernández del Valle, 2003). Before this dissertation, there were no studies on the presence of a social network linked to these girls. The lack of a social support network means that the transition to adult life is a source of additional stress, especially after leaving the institution. The fragility of the support network—in terms of family and friends—increases the emotional worry these girls already experience due to abandonment, family separation, or violence. In addition, it is widely known that a supportive social network can provide protection in general for women when facing vulnerabilities (Hackman et al., 2017; Semahegn et al., 2019).

For all the above and based on research on feminist mentoring among peers in which young foster care women participated as “mentees” and young women not in foster care were the “mentors”, we developed a specific line of research that would provide the basis for this study. The methodology used for the study has a predominantly qualitative approach; the design is qualitative, but the data analysis is mixed. The population were 59 young women (29 foster care girls and 30 non foster care). The quantitative approach for data analysis is based on frequency analysis, and the qualitative approach follows a topic-based analysis. The analysis was carried out with the qualitative data analysis application Nvivo12.

The main results show that the perception of gender-related violence is quite similar among the participants of both groups. Depending on the degree of knowledge they have about the fundamental aspects of male chauvinist violence in the romantic couple, they consider one or the other type of violence as more or less serious. In this sense, four very clear strategies

for coping with gender-based violence in sexual and affective relationships are identified, which are used according to the perception of danger and the degree of social acceptance of violence. Moreover, social capital in terms of support would have a relationship with the strategy for coping with violence.

Thus, family members and some specific attachment with other referents raise the possibility to break down a sexual–affective relationship based on violence against women.

From the point of view of the social network, it is important to highlight those girls in foster care would have a low support they can receive from their social network, so they would feel quite lonely in the face of adverse situations such as male chauvinist violence relationship or running out of economic resources.

Key words: Girl, foster care, gender-related violence, romantic love, social network.



## Nº4 – The experiences of transgender and gender expansive young people in foster care systems in the U.S.

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Research Method/Type of your study: qualitative, multiple case study.

### Background and Purpose

Former foster care involved youth, in particular transgender and gender expansive youth are often uniquely alienated, as many suffer from a lack of social, medical and family support resulting from their involvement in the foster care system. Although all youth who exit foster care as adults may have difficulty accessing the support, they need to become healthy-functioning adults, these issues may be exacerbated for transgender and gender expansive youth who often face added challenges associated with their gender identity and expression. This lack of support is significant and critical for achieving healthy development and functioning in young adulthood. Despite risks, this research focusing on transgender and gender expansive youth, particularly those in foster care systems is limited. In addressing this paucity of information, this study explores the range of experiences of a national cohort of transgender and gender expansive youth who have had experience in foster care systems and offers recommendations on developing models of promoting trans affirming approaches to improve foster care systems for transgender and gender expansive youth placed in them.

### Methods

Data were gathered through in-depth, face-to-face interviews, observations, and focus groups with 23 participants, aged 21-27 years, that had exited the foster care systems within the past five years. Participants were asked questions related to their experiences with peers, staff, and systems as they related to their experiences as a self-identified transgender, non-binary or gender expansive individual. Data was analyzed using a combination of qualitative structural and thematic narrative analysis methods.

## Results

Transgender and gender expansive youth from foster care systems have a range of experiences both positive and negative with respect to accessing trans-competent services and developing supportive relationships. Young people reported problems with handling threats to their safety and wellbeing, navigating the health and mental health care systems, addressing social and medical transition issues and relationships with friends, family, social workers and other service providers. This evidence suggests that the supports and services transgender and gender expansive youth receive may be inadequate for addressing their distinctive mental health, health and wellbeing needs.

## Conclusions and Implications

Results generate new insights about the unique experiences and perspectives of transgender and gender expansive individuals after exiting foster care systems as young adults and offers critical information about how gender identity and gender expression may play out during their young adulthood. Findings provide policymakers, researchers, and practitioners with the information they need to develop strategies that better support increase the quality of care and services they receive, and ultimately to improve their lives. Recommendations for improving policies and practices are provided.

## Take Aways

- Participants will take away an understanding of the unique needs of trans and gender expansive young people in the foster care system.
- Participants will consider ways in which they can implement trans-affirming practices in their foster care systems.
- Participants will consider qualitative approaches to developing research with trans and gender expansive youth – utilizing the voices of young people.