

**Maintaining child-parent
relationships in long-term foster
placements:
a matter of representations**

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French context of foster care

- 9 placements for 1000 children aged 0-18 years
 - Court rulings: 88%
 - Administrative decisions: 12%
- 55% of out-of-home care is foster care
 - 2005 law on foster carers reinforces professionalization and training
- Foster carers receive a monthly salary
- Parents keep parental authority and the right to maintain contact

Policies on out-of-home placements

- Law n°2002-2 redefining social and medico-social policies:
 - *Service users (children and parents) gained additional rights*
- Law n°2007-293 reforming child protection :
 - *reinforces prevention of difficulties,*
 - *introduces 'project for the child'*
- Debate on a new Law on child protection
 - *'life project for the child' becomes mandatory,*
 - *seek for stability in placements*

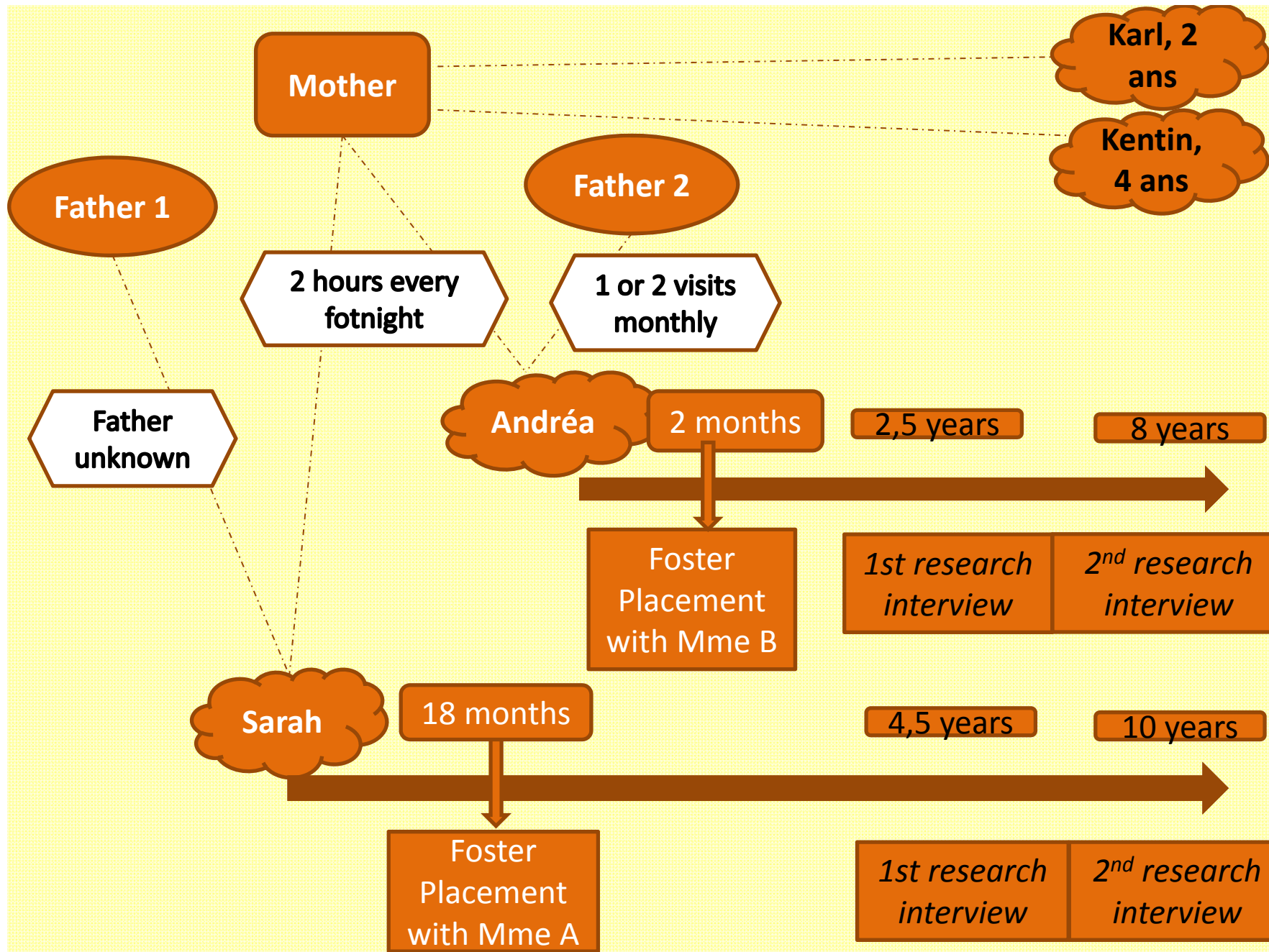
Context of the research

- Longitudinal research 2006 and 2011 involving 40 children in foster care, their parents, carers and social workers
- Using quantitative and qualitative tools
- Explore the evolution of the child's attachment to carer and parents
- See the impact of the perceptions different protagonists of foster care have of each other
- Funded by *Observatoire National de l'Enfance en Danger* (ONED)



Case study

- Aims to understand the importance of visits and meetings between children and parents
- Draws on the analysis of 4 semi-structured interviews with carers and of the recorded mother's answers to a questionnaire about « parental involvement» (inspired by Steinhauer)



Andréa's and Sarah's situation

Communication on visits

- Carers know little about the contents of visits
- Carers and mother don't talk much
- Information about each other comes from social workers and from children
- Carers' evaluation of mother's competencies are based on their perceptions of what happens during the visits
- This does not change significantly between 2006 and 2011

Experiences of visits

- carers say
 - Mother is too authoritarian
 - Mother does not adjust to the girls' needs
 - Girls are not happy about visits
 - Visits are not appropriate
 - Mother damages the image of the girls' fathers
- mother feels
 - Pressure to prove that she is a good mother (control): need show love AND authority
 - Sarah doesn't talk to her
 - She would like to have more visits
 - Seeing their fathers harms or would harm the girls

Mother's experience

« They tell me not to shout, I don't mind, but what if she doesn't listen to me?

They tell me: 'well, no, you've got two hours, that's for you and your child'.

But she needs to be told off now, not... in 10 years - when a disaster happens. »

Experiences of visits

These different views on visits reflect the level of acceptance

- Of the care order and it's relevance
- Of the necessity of separating the child from it's parents
- Of the child growing up in and identifying with « another » family
- Of the legitimacy of the foster family

Role of social workers

The interviews with the mother and the carers reveal that the social workers

- are in the background
- determine the conditions of visits
- control what happens
- provide information on what should happen

Long term foster care

Interviews conducted in 2006 and 2011 with Andréa's and Sarah's mother and carers describe

- Mother's sense of responsibility decreasing
- Mother – daughter interactions getting worse
- Mother's increased feeling of powerlessness
- Positive impacts of care on Andréa and Sarah

Beyond the case study: Some results on the whole sample

- Location of contact
when the visits are held at the parents' home, the foster carer perceive the mother as more involved, more competent and more reliable
- Parents' attendance to the contact meetings
when the mother is always there at the meetings, carers feel that the care arrangement has a positive impact on the mother
- Absence of meetings
when no contact is held between the child and their parents, this does not imply an alienation of the child to their carer.

Conclusions

- When visits go well and are frequent this leads to a higher rating of parents' competencies
- Visits are used as an implicit factor for the assessment of care situations
- This puts a high pressure on parents during the visits, leading to panic and counterproductive reactions

Implications for practice

- ➔ Different experiences and perceptions of the visits should be discussed between children, social workers, parents and carers
- ➔ The same information should be shared between all people involved
- ➔ Criterias for the assessment of care situations should be made explicit

Thank you for your attention

La qualité d'attachement de l'enfant accueilli

- En 2006 : « Histoires d'attachement à compléter » (Bretherton, 1991) auprès de 38 enfants
- En 2011 :
 - Inventaire d'Attachement Parent-Adolescent (IAPA, Larose et Boivin, 1991) utilisé pour la relation enfant-assistant familial
 - Questionnaire d'Attachement Non-Résolu (QANRA, Thibaudeau, 2006) utilisé pour la relation enfant-parent
 - Auprès de 22 enfants, 8 garçons, 14 filles, âgés en moyenne de 10 ans, accueillis depuis 8,5 ans en moyenne suite à une décision judiciaire en majorité (4AP), 16 sont toujours dans la même famille.

- **La parentalité d'accueil des assistants familiaux**
 - Entretien semi-directif en 2006 et 2011
 - 18 assistants familiaux en 2011, âgées en moyenne de 53 ans avec 13 ans d'ancienneté
- **L'implication parentale**
 - Questionnaire d'implication parentale (QRIP) version parent (92 items), assistant familial (87 items) et référent (203 items) en 2006 et en 2011
 - 5 dimensions :
 - L'interaction parent-enfant
 - Les compétences parentales
 - Le sentiment de responsabilité
 - La disponibilité du parent
 - L'effet de l'accueil
 - 13 QRIP parent, 9 QRIP assistant familial, 5 QRIP référent

Les parentalités