

# the long way to **FAMILY REUNIFICATION**

Factors associated with family reunification for children in foster care

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# Permanency Planning

return to birth family

placed for adoption

permanent family  
placement

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond

# Context

- International consensus on the need for out-of-home children to obtain a permanent solution within the shortest possible period
- General agreement in family reunification as the most appropriate solution, once the family has overcome the obstacles
- **BUT** in the practice of child protection, family reunification is still clearly difficult to achieve

**1**

**Question**

**What are the factors associated with success and failure of family reunification?**

**2**

**Previous  
research**

children's characteristics that  
that make reunification more  
difficult

being older, presenting disabilities,  
health problems, mental health issues,  
emotional and behavioral problems...

# 2

## Previous research

characteristics of the biological family which are obstacles for the return of the child

one-parent family status, poverty, abuse of alcohol and other drugs or having a great geographical distance with the children

# 2

## Previous research

The return can be influenced by variables of the protection process

Type of carers, time in care, frequency and regularity of family contact, commitment by social workers, decision-making processes, type and intensity of family support

# 3

## The study

**SAMPLE** ► 305 cases closed in the previous 5 years. 55% in non-kinship care and 45% in kinship care. Girls accounted for 52%

**DATA COLLECTION** ► Review of child care files through an instrument with variables on the children, the families, and the process + interview with social workers



# 3

## The study

### STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

► The t test for comparison of means in quantitative variables. Other variables were dichotomized into 0 and 1

The  $\chi^2$  test to analyze possible associations between each factor and the variable reunification-no reunification.

# OUTCOMES AND REASONS FOR CASE CLOSURE

# 4

## Results

	Non-kinship Care (n = 163) %	Kinship Care (n = 142) %
Reunification	15	26
Adoption	20	2
Reached adulthood	25	44
Disruption	26	16
Change to residential placement	10	8
Other	4	4

# THE **RATE** OF FAMILY **REUNIFICATION**

... for the total sample was **20%**,  
although it was significantly different  
in kinship care (26%) than in non-  
kinship care (15%)

# INFLUENCE OF **AGE**

mean age at the **beginning** of foster care was similar for both types of care: **around 8 yrs. 6 months**. BUT care ended an average of **one year later** for children in kinship care

# INFLUENCE OF AGE

reunification was more likely in those children who had **begun their placement earlier**, in non-kinship care (reunification:  $M=5.51$ ; no reunification:  $M=9.04$ ) and kinship care (reunification:  $M=5.65$ ; no reunification:  $M=9.63$ )

**lower age at the end of placement in the family reunification group**, in both non-kinship (reunification:  $M=7.49$ ; no reunification:  $M=12.94$ ) and kinship care (reunification:  $M=9.09$ ; no reunification:  $M=14.94$ )

# DURATION IN FOSTER CARE

in the group in which reunification took place, mean time in care for non-kinship cases was **1.98** and for kinship cases **3.43**

# DIFFERENCE OF INCIDENCE OF FAMILY **REUNIFICATION** FACTORS

Non-kinship  
foster care 1

		Reunification %	No reunification %	$\chi^2$	p
<b>Children</b>	Sex (male)	56	47	0.67	.274
	Presence of serious health problems	4	6	0.13	.585
	Presence of disabilities	8	9	0.13	.634
	Presence of behavioural problems	4	11	1.12	.257
	<b>Has received psychological treatment</b>	4	23	4.82	.018
	Physical abuse	8	16	1.03	.247
	<b>Physical neglect</b>	8	43	11.14	.000
	Emotional abuse	12	17	0.32	.410
	<b>Total abandonment</b>	4	26	5.81	.009
	<b>Request for voluntary foster care</b>	56	14	22.32	.000
<b>Process</b>	<b>Previous residential care measure</b>	28	77	23.98	.000
	Previous breakdown of foster care	16	28	1.59	.155
	<b>Visits with birth family</b>	84	55	7.54	.004
	<b>Frequent visits</b>	52	9	30.84	.000

# DIFFERENCE OF INCIDENCE OF FAMILY **REUNIFICATION** FACTORS

Non-kinship  
foster care 2

		Reunification (N=25) %	No reunification (N=138) %	$\chi^2$	p
Biological family	Drug dependence in father	16	19	0.10	.501
	<b>Alcoholism in father</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>.035</b>
	Father in prison	12	13	0.01	.598
	Drug dependence in mother	12	22	1.21	.207
	Alcoholism in mother	0	11	2.96	.074
	<b>Mental health problems in mother</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>4.03</b>	<b>.032</b>
	<b>Mother in prison</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6.41</b>	<b>.018</b>
	Mother with chronic illness	4	7	0.34	.477
	<b>Other children in care</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>8.60</b>	<b>.003</b>
	<b>Father cooperates</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8.74</b>	<b>.008</b>
	<b>Mother cooperates</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>22.11</b>	<b>.000</b>



# DIFFERENCE OF INCIDENCE OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION FACTORS

Kinship foster  
care 1

		Reunification %	No reunification %	$\chi^2$	p
Children	Sex (male)	56	45	1.25	.177
	Presence of serious health problems	6	9	0.33	.433
	Presence of disabilities	0	5	1.77	.223
	Presence of behavioural problems	14	13	0.00	.565
	Has received psychological treatment	11	17	0.74	.284
	Physical abuse	6	12	1.31	.207
	Physical neglect	30	41	1.22	.182
	Emotional abuse	25	31	0.39	.345
	<b>Total abandonment</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>9.36</b>	<b>.001</b>
	Request for voluntary foster care	28	15	2.80	.080
Process	<b>Previous residential care measure</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>4.42</b>	<b>.026</b>
	Previous breakdown of foster care	8	18	1.94	.128
	Visits with birth family	58	52	0.38	.337
	Frequent visits	25	18	0.80	.252

# DIFFERENCE OF INCIDENCE OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION FACTORS

Kinship foster  
care 2

		Reunification (N=36) %	No reunification (N=106) %	$\chi^2$	p
Biological family	<b>Drug dependence in father</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>5.56</b>	<b>.016</b>
	Alcoholism in father	8	19	2.25	.104
	Father in prison	25	23	0.06	.478
	Drug dependence in mother	56	39	2.97	.063
	Alcoholism in mother	6	16	2.60	.086
	Mental health problems in mother	6	17	2.95	.068
	Mother in prison	25	15	1.75	.143
	<b>Mother with chronic illness</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4.49</b>	<b>.024</b>
	Other children in care	53	50	0.11	.443
	<b>Father cooperates</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>3.26</b>	<b>.050</b>
<b>Mother cooperates</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>11.05</b>	<b>.001</b>	

# Variables affecting the **REUNIFICATION** regardless type of care

having suffered **total abandonment**,  
having been in **residential care** (made  
reunification more difficult) and parents'  
**cooperation** (facilitated reunification)

**5**

**Key  
ideas**

**the influence of the  
TYPE OF FOSTER CARE**


- ▶ Our results show that reunification is more frequent when children have been in kinship care but it takes longer



**5**

**Key  
ideas**

**cooperation  
of PARENTS**



strong association with family return,  
in both non-kinship and kinship care

support for the idea of working intensely with the family and for the need to implement measures of partnership among the parties involved

**5**

**Key  
ideas**

## **frequency of FAMILY CONTACT**

- ▶ receiving visits by the parents was associated with reunification only in children in non-kinship care
- ▶ the group of children with the highest frequency of visits was the most likely to be reunited

visits should be considered as an essential aspect to be worked on in family intervention

**5**

**Key  
ideas**

## **STABILITY during care intervention**

- ▶ having had previous experiences of other care placements was negatively related to family reunification

5

Key  
ideas

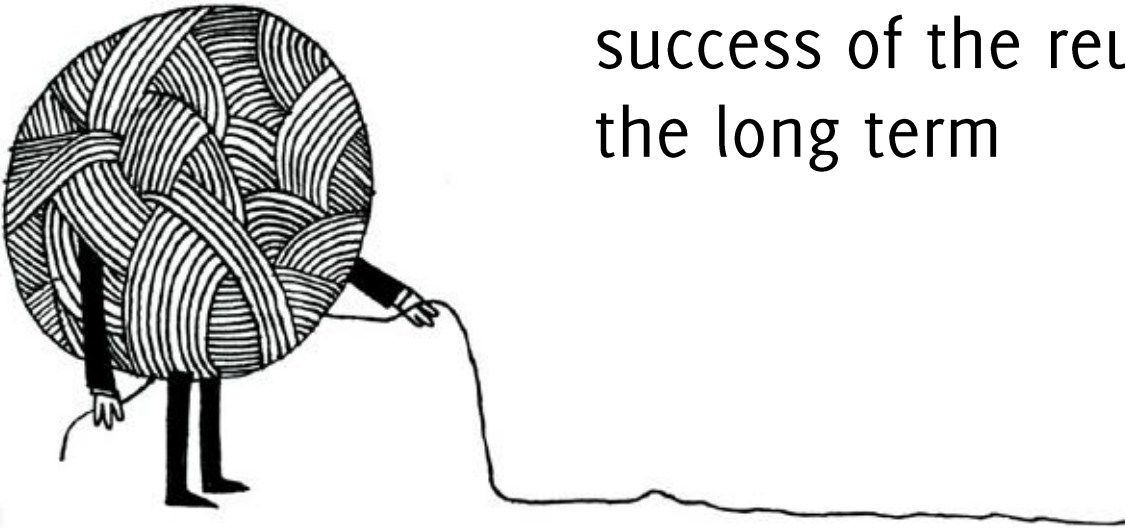
## characteristics of the BIOLOGICAL FAMILY

- ▶ in non-kinship care a relapse into **alcoholism** emerges as a factor that hinders reunification, whilst in the case of kinship care it is the mother's problems of **chronic illness** or **mental health** that have more impact



# LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Accuracy of files
- Absence of evidence about the success of the reunification in the long term



**THANK YOU FOR  
YOUR ATTENTION**

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