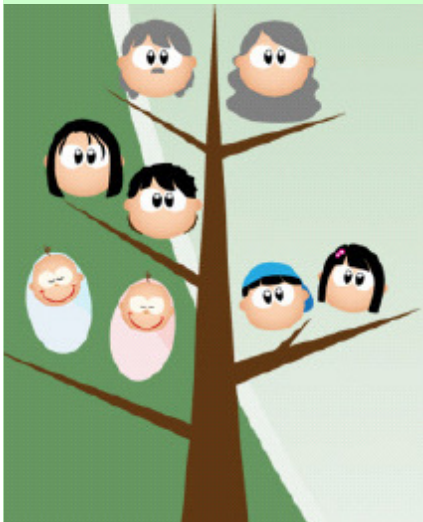


When birth parents speak...

A study on mothers' experiences of kinship foster care

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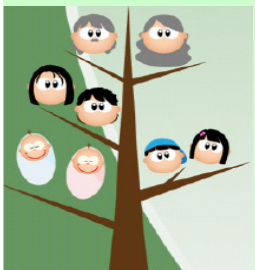


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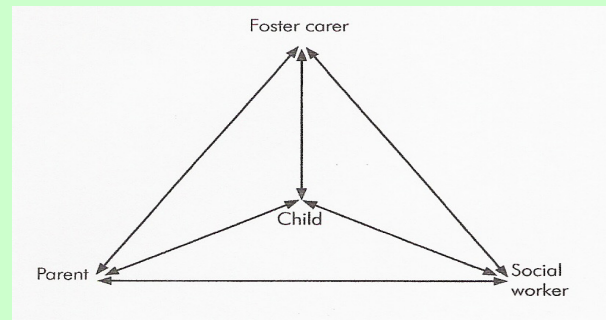
Objectives

- Add to the research on biological parents' lived experiences of child placement and foster care
- Add to our understanding of kinship foster care



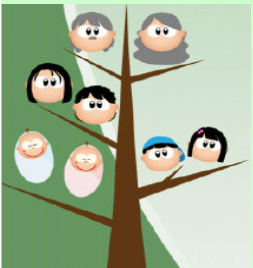


- Foster care is highly complex



Schofield & Ward,
2011, p. 210

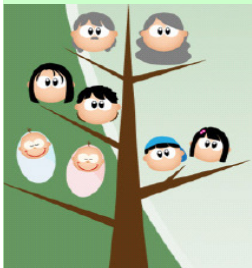
- Biological parents' perspectives are understudied
 - parents as partners
 - contacts with parents are predictors of positive outcome
 - but what do we know about the parents' lived experiences and their journey through care?

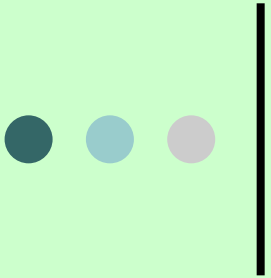




Research questions

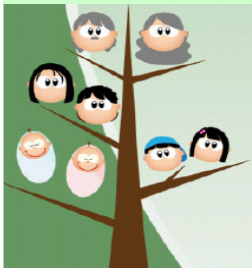
1. How do mothers of children in kinship care (with relatives) experience placement?
2. How do they experience their role as mother?





Data collection

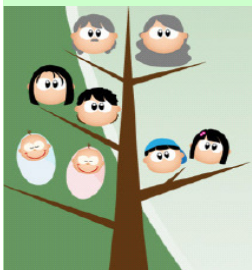
- Qualitative research design
- Criteria for inclusion
 - mothers
 - kinship foster care and child living with relatives
 - care within the child welfare (child protection) system
- Mothers were recruited from four services (response: 50%)
- Semi-structured interviews during home visits
- Two researchers conducted the interviews
- Duration of the interviews between 30 min. and three hours
- Informed consent procedure





Data analysis

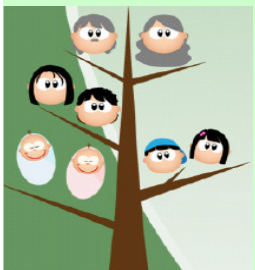
- Interviews were literally transcribed
- Development of scheme with 19 codes and subcodes within each code
- Interview per interview has been coded and recoded
- Common themes and patterns were identified

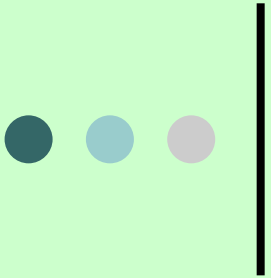




Participants

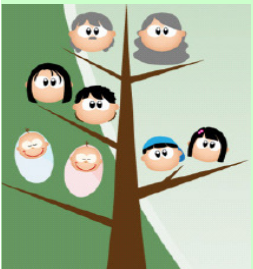
- 21 mothers interviewed (out of 25 recruited)
 - about 50% has a history of placement
 - multiple problems (financial situation, mental health problems, drug abuse, lack of social network)
- 29 children in kinship foster care living with relatives
- 18 children were placed for more than two years
- 23 were living with grandparents
- 15 children were placed by the court
- Various reasons for placement





How do mothers experience the placement?

- About the start of the placement
 - initiative to kinship care
 - mothers who don't remember
 - mothers who tell contradictory stories
 - mothers to whom it is not clear who has taken the initiative for placement
 - involvement in decision-making
 - 13 mothers had some involvement
 - 7 mothers reported they were not involved
 - 1 mother can't remember
 - little information about the screening of the foster parents
 - mothers gave different reasons for the placement which did not always correspond with the reasons reported in the case files
 - for about one out of four mothers the out-of-home placement was no surprise
 - mothers report a range of feelings when the child was placed

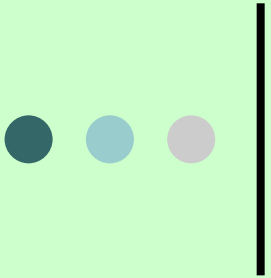




- Most mothers prefer a placement with relatives, although they see disadvantages
- During placement mothers try to gain control over their lives
- 11 mothers are more or less satisfied with foster care, but 8 eight are very dissatisfied
- Mothers have mixed future perspectives
 - uncertainty
 - hope
 - longing for the child to be back home and reunification

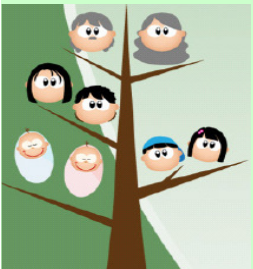


- A number strongly negative feelings
 - angry
 - pain
 - powerless
 - sad
 - guilty
 - regret
 - missing
- Negative feelings are 'triggered' (e.g., by the child's birthday)
- Some mothers report positive feelings and understand that placement is in the best interests of the child and of themselves



How do they experience their role as mother?

- Mothers miss a lot
- Mothers want to have 'fun' during the contacts with their child
- Mothers try to do their best to maintain in some way or another a parenting role
- 'She/he remains my child'
- The child takes the first place



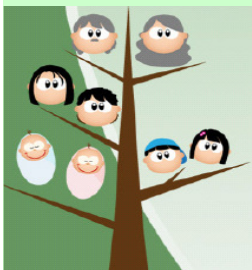


- How do mothers experience the role of the foster parents?
 - they trust the foster parents, but
 - they have little to say (no joint decision-making)
 - foster parents ‘spoil’ the child, they are ‘conservative’ and there is insufficient discipline
 - positive comments (e.g., foster parents learn the child to behave appropriately, they inform the mothers)
 - mothers have difficulties defining the role of the foster parents



Some conclusions

- Out-of-home placement of a child means a loss, mothers grief ('disenfranchised grief') and have mixed feelings
- Mothers accept the placement better when
 - there was a joint decision-making process
 - they started to accept the loss
 - keep a role as mother
 - feel supported by the foster care worker
 - have a positive relationship with the foster parents

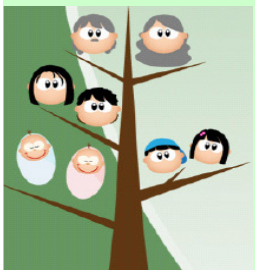




Some recommendations

○ For practice

- mothers are in need of support; different needs should be addressed
- sometimes placement with relatives is not in the best interests of mother and child
- better and earlier screening of kinship foster parents





○ For research

- collect stories of mothers with child placed with non-relatives and compare
- longitudinal study of mothers' narratives and lived experiences
- use other methods in addition to interviews
- compare stories of satisfied and dissatisfied mothers
- include the voices of fathers



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