

# EVOLUTION OF FOSTER CARE IN PORTUGAL: PERSPECTIVES OF FOSTER CHILDREN AND CARERS

7<sup>th</sup> International Foster Care Network Meeting  
Padova, 9-11 September 2013



João M. S. Carvalho  
ISMAI – Instituto Superior da Maia



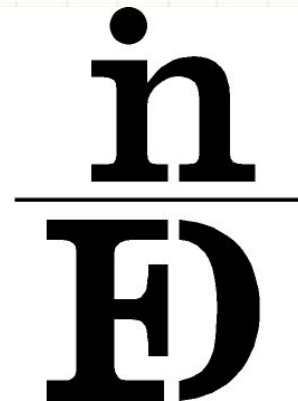
Paulo Delgado  
Escola Superior de Educação do Porto



Vânia S. Pinto  
AMI – Assistência Médica Internacional



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# The research – General objective

- Characterize and analyze foster care in Porto district, in 2011, that represented 52% (289) of foster placements for children in Portugal.
- Is foster care an appropriate context for children development?

# Research questions

- Describe the profile of foster care protagonists;
- Determine the different stages and processes of each placement;
- Analyze the degree of satisfaction of carers and children with the experience;
- Analyze the educational pathways of children in foster care, as well as...
- Assess how long term foster care can ensure safety and permanency;
- Analyze the initial enactment of the new Law on Foster Care in Portugal and assess the results and impact of their application.

# Methodology

- Official data about the 289 children and their families
- Personal interviews with 52 foster families
- Two focus group sessions with 14 young people
- Children's adaptation questionnaire

# Portuguese child care system

- 95% in residential care
- *“Foster care provide the most appropriate alternative to achieve the best interests of the child, provided that promotes their full and harmonious development”* (Convention of the Rights of the Child).

# Comparision between current situation and the beginning of foster care

<b>Relation between the child and the male carer</b>	<b>p &lt; .05</b>
Relation between the child and the female carer	p = 11.7
Relation between the child and the carers' sons	p = 13.2
Relation between the child and her mother	p = 73.9
Relation between the child and her father	p = 60.8
Will of the child to visit her mother	p = 21.6
Will of the child to visit her father or other relatives	p = 74.8
Consequences for the child related to visiting her mother	p = 70.5
Consequences for the child related to visiting her father or other relatives	p = 91.4
Consequences for the carers related to child's visit to her biological family	p = 18.0
<b>Child's health</b>	<b>p &lt; .001</b>
<b>Psychological well-being of the child</b>	<b>p &lt; .001</b>
<b>Social relationships of the child</b>	<b>p &lt; .01</b>
<b>Behavior of the child at home</b>	<b>p &lt; .001</b>
<b>Child's motivation to study</b>	<b>p &lt; .01</b>
<b>Academic performance of the child</b>	<b>p &lt; .01</b>
<b>Behavior of the child at school</b>	<b>p &lt; .01</b>

# Foster carers' perspective

- Less positive aspects:
  - lack of training to perform that activity, especially in situations where children have developmental difficulties;
  - gaps in information received about the child, particularly on her family life and health stories;
  - and uncertainty regarding the expected duration of foster care.



# Foster carers' perspective

	Frequency	Percent
Success	39	75,0
Some positives results	7	13,5
Some problems	5	9,6
Serious problems	1	1,9

- Expressions of affection, the joy of children and their development are referred to as the main rewards of a demanding and difficult work.

# Children's point of view

- Negative evaluation of the relationship with biological family, described as distant, inconstant and associated with maltreatment memories.
- *“I was also angry with my father because when my mother died he came to me and gave me a pair of pajamas for a child of three years old. Well, I was 9 years old at that time, and I did not like it. Now I laugh, but at the time I did not laugh...”* (GD1.19:10-13 Tânia)

# Children's point of view

- Desire to be able to decide about contact and with whom they want to have contact.
- Desire to have an active voice in decisions about their pathway in the protection system.
- *“When I moved to the host family I changed school and then, after a year, I returned again to my mother and she wanted me to transfer to the school near by where she lived. I did not like that and I stayed in the same school. I have something to say about it, and said: I like this school and do not want to change schools” (GD1.10:28 a 11:8)*

# Focus groups main results

- General well-being with foster care;
- The feeling of belonging to foster care families;
- Positive perception about their support;
- Relationship with the carers is the aspect where young people feel that have been further evolution from the beginning to the present.
- The positive evolution related to physical and psychological health was illustrated with several examples;

# Focus groups main results

- There is a feeling of gratitude in relation to foster families, criticizing the mistreatment they suffered with biological families;
- Integration into the foster family gave them a place of welfare, development and security, which they would like to maintain;
- Some of them express feelings of insecurity and instability for the future, which are related to the transition to independence.

# Conclusions

- There is a positive evolution, in which the current situation is perceived as better than what happened at the beginning of the fostering.
- It is important to invest in deinstitutionalization, on behalf of children's welfare, education and affection.
- They have the right to live in a family; therefore it is very important to have more children with access to a foster care family.
- It is also crucial to have a policy of recruitment and selection of new carers, based on their commitment, dedication and competence.

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- Thank you for your attention!
  - [jcarvalho@ismai.pt](mailto:jcarvalho@ismai.pt)
  - [pdelgado@ese.ipp.pt](mailto:pdelgado@ese.ipp.pt)
  - [vaniasspinto@hotmail.com](mailto:vaniasspinto@hotmail.com)