

Characterization of matching in foster families

Caracterización del emparejamiento en familias de acogida

Jaime Muñoz Insunza¹, Pamela Jiménez Etcheverría^{1*}, Mónica López López²

¹ Departamento de Psicología, Universidad de La Frontera, Temuco, Chile

² Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences, University of Groningen, The Netherlands

* pamela.jimenez@ufrontera.cl

Received: March 30, 2021

Accepted: Noviembre 15, 2021

Background

Foster care is a temporary family-based placement for children whose parents cannot take care of them. A good matching between the foster family and the child might improve the outcomes of this placement. In Chile, foster care programs are managed by SENAME (National Service of Minors), and NGOs. Moreover, the Chilean child protection system has two kinds of placement: kinship and non-kinship.

Aims

This article reports a qualitative study carried out to explore the professional decision of matching a child with a non-kinship foster family in the child protection system in Chile.

Method & procedures

We conducted 17 semi-structured interviews in total -regarding matching in decision making- with professionals working in foster care agencies in five regions of Chile. Topics discussed were determined by the theoretical evidence in matching decision and the frameworks of child making decision (DME, JUDPIC). Hierarchical content analysis was used to identify a structure of meanings in answers of practitioners. We used saturation of information, interrater coding and other reliability procedures.

Results & discussion

We identified five central constructs related to the case, the caregiver, the child, the organization, and the decision makers, and additionally, a specific category related to caregiver, which is not described in frameworks of child making decision. Moreover, we discuss the preponderance of criteria used by professionals in the process of matching, especially the importance of case factors and caregivers' factors in the final decision of matching. On the other hand, matching is described as a dynamic and interactive process, because different variables take on different relevance according to timing of judicial process. At the beginning, the foster family assessment is most important (caregiver's factors), but later, case factors and child factors take on preponderance on decision making. As transversal variables during the decision-making process, we observed the organization and decision makers factors. Additionally, we analyze other relevant content found, and others implications of the findings for research, policy and practice, with a special focus on the implications for the Chilean child protection system.

Conclusion

Our findings highlight several challenges to the Chilean child protection system, especially on enhance the making-decision process. The child welfare system needs to give more alternatives of substitute care, allowing practitioners to choose among different options (i.e., short placement, weekend placement, etc.). Another challenge that appeared is related to increase the availability of foster families, because the more availability

of families, more possibilities for practitioners to make better decisions. Finally, the matching decision process could be improved including and facilitating children's participation in the decision and considering ethnic variables in the process itself.

Keywords: child welfare system in Chile, decision-making, foster care, matching

References:

- Baumann, D., Dalgleish, L., Fluke, J., & Kern, H. (2011). *The decision-making ecology*. American Humane Association. <https://bit.ly/3D4wrUA>
- López, M. & del Valle, J. F. (2016). La experiencia del acogimiento familiar en España: Análisis de las vulnerabilidades de un modelo de acogida permanente. *Psicothema*, 28(2), 122-129. <https://doi.org/10.7334/psicothema2015.168>
- Zeijlmans, K., López, M., Grietens, H., & Knorth, E. J. (2017). Matching children with foster cares: A literature review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 73, 257-265. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.12.017>
- Zeijlmans, K., López, M., Grietens, H., & Knorth, E. J. (2018). "Nothing goes as planned": Practitioners reflect on matching children and foster families. *Child and Family Social Work*, 23(3), 458-465. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12437>

Acknowledgements: MEC 80180047 Project.

How to cite: Muñoz Insunza, J., Jiménez Etcheverría, P., & López López, M. (2022). Caracterización del emparejamiento en familias de acogida. *Psicoperspectivas*, 21(1). <https://dx.doi.org/10.5027/vol21-issue1-fulltext-2279>



Publicado bajo licencia [Creative Commons Attribution International 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)