



Original research article

Motivation, expectations, and needs of foster parents

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Abstract

Introduction: In the Czech Republic, there is a lack of research examining the motivations and expectations of foster parents, as well as how foster care fulfils their needs. One of the main reasons why we are addressing this issue is that institutional care for children under the age of 3 was abolished at the end of 2024 and replaced by family care.

Objectives: The paper aims to examine the experiences of individuals in the process of providing foster care.

Methods: The research was carried out using a qualitative research strategy. The research population was foster parents from the Moravian-Silesian region. The data were collected through a semi-structured interview technique and analysed by a thematic analysis method.

Results: The results showed that drug addiction and problems with their offspring or neglect of their own children were important motives for foster care among kinship foster parents. For non-kinship foster parents, the main motivation was an inability to have their own child and the desire to fulfill the parental role.

Conclusion: It is important to remember that each foster parent enters this role with different motivations, expectations, and individual needs. Therefore, we need to focus on understanding the motives and needs of foster parents in order to offer them effective support.

Keywords: Foster care; Foster parent expectations; Foster parent motivation; Foster parent needs; Institutional care

Introduction

Foster care is a crucial element of the child protection system in the Czech Republic, providing children who cannot be raised in their biological families with a stable and nourishing environment. The motivations and needs of those who choose this challenging role (and the responsibility that comes with it) are diverse and often deeply personal. This paper focuses on exploring these motivations, with the aim of providing a better understanding and support for Czech foster parents. The relevance of the topic is underlined by the fact that, at the end of 2024, institutional care for children up to the age of 3 (i.e., infant care institutions) was discontinued and replaced by care in families (in line with Act No. 363/2021 Coll.).

In the future, it will be necessary to increase the number of foster parents and foster families. Efforts will be made to increase interest in foster and substitute family care so that there will be enough foster parents once the new law has been adopted. For the Czech Republic, this is a challenge to ensure one of the alternative forms of care. The motivation, expectations, and needs of those undertaking fostering will play a major role in whether the requirements of this challenging task can be fulfilled.

Foster care is a complex phenomenon that encompasses diverse motives of individuals who have made a decision to provide temporary or permanent family care to children in need. A great body of international research has been devoted to the motivation of foster parents and foster families, significantly contributing to successful parenting and influencing the quality of foster care (Canali et al., 2017; Caron et al., 2022; Davi et al., 2021; Diogo and Branco, 2019; Miko et al., 2022; Neagoe et al., 2019; Yaroshenko, 2020). Most of these studies agree that foster parents' motivation is a complex and personal decision that is influenced by their life experiences, values, and beliefs. The expectations of foster parents also play a role in the foster care process, but they may not be satisfactorily fulfilled (Moyer and Goldberg, 2017).

Research examining motivations for and expectations of foster care, as well as how foster care meets the needs of foster parents, is lacking in the Czech Republic. The Student Grant Competition (SGC) project of the Faculty of Social Studies, University of Ostrava, aims to fill this gap. The main research objective of this project is to examine the experiences of individuals in the process of providing foster care. In current social science knowledge, particularly within substitute family care (SFC), there is a lack of qualitative data that would offer a deeper understanding of motivational aspects, which large-

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ly remain at a descriptive level. The theoretical background of the research draws on the widely applicable Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), McClelland's Three Needs Theory (Madsen, 1972), Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation (Armstrong, 2002), and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2002; Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2020).

The location of the research, the Moravian-Silesian Region (MSR), is the most successful region in the development of SFC in the Czech Republic. Currently, 700 children in this region are growing up in children's homes, even though they could be living in substitute families. Last year 130 applicants applied for some form of SFC, and 90 children were accepted into SFC or adoption (Kraj poděkoval pěstounům..., 2023). According to the MSR statistics, a total of 3,327 applications were received and 1,987 children were placed in SFC between 2004–2022 (Náhradní rodinná péče – statistika žadatelů/děti, 2023).

Materials and methods

The main research objective was set as follows: *To examine the experiences of individuals in the process of providing foster care.*

As part of the research, we sought answers to one main and three secondary research questions.

The main research question was: *“How do foster parents experience the process of providing foster care?”*

This was then divided into three sub-research questions.

1. *With what expectations do persons enter the process of providing foster care?*
2. *What are the motives of foster parents for providing foster care?*
3. *How are the needs of foster parents met in the process of providing foster care?*

The above research questions are based on the project title and focus on solving the important social problem described in the introduction to this article.

A qualitative research strategy was used to meet these objectives. This research strategy was chosen because its essence is to explore a certain phenomenon in depth and to bring the maximum amount of information about it (Švaříček et al., 2014). Data collection was carried out using the technique of semi-structured interviews (Miovský, 2006). The communication partners in the qualitative research were foster parents; namely foster families from the Moravian-Silesian region, who were selected via purposive sampling through an institution and according to predetermined criteria (Miovský, 2006). One of the criteria was the inclusion of both mediated and unmediated foster parents in line with Act No. 89/2012 Coll. The reason for including both types of foster care was the possibility for data comparison. Another criterion was that the communication partners had to come from the Moravian-Silesian region. Selecting participants from a single region ensures a higher degree of sample homogeneity, which is important for the consistency of data in terms of subsequent analysis. As previously mentioned, this region is the most successful in the development of substitute family care in the Czech Republic. Therefore, in this research, it serves as an example of best practice, which may serve as a source of inspiration for other regions in the country.

We reached out to foster parents by directly contacting them. The interviews were recorded on the telephone, then transcribed verbatim into text form, analysed, and subse-

quently deleted. We carried out a total of nine semi-structured interviews with foster parents from the Moravian-Silesian region. Specifically, we interviewed eight kinship parents, and one non-kinship foster parent. Sociodemographic characteristics of the communication partners involved in the research can be found in the [Suppl. Table S1](#). While implementing the research, we needed to consider theoretical saturation of the data (Miovský, 2006), and thus conducting the research until data saturation.

The placement period of children in foster care ranged from 1–13 years. In the case of unmediated care, care by grandparents predominated. To anonymise the data, we are not reporting the name of the intermediary organisation, nor the specific ages of the communication partners – only an age range.

In terms of ethical aspects of the research, we complied with the rule on a safe environment for the communication partners. In this context, it was an environment in which the communication partners had a choice of where to carry out the interview. Prior to the interviews, written informed consent to participate in the research was signed by each communication partner. They were informed of the research objective and data anonymisation. Their involvement was voluntary. Each participant was free to discontinue or terminate their participation in the research at any time. In the data analysis and interpretation section, individual communication partners are identified by the letter I supplemented by a number, i.e., I1 to I9, as can be seen in direct quotations of the communication partners.

For data analysis and interpretation, we chose the thematic analysis method, which was first explained by psychologists Braun and Clarke (2021). The acquired data are organised and described in detail; this method is particularly suitable for obtaining answers to research questions about people's experiences and their views (Hendl, 2016).

Results

First we re-read the transcribed interviews multiple times, marked the relevant passages, and assigned conceptual codes to them. The codes were then grouped into themes and sub-themes. A total of 11 themes emerged: *Motivation for foster care, Preparation for foster care, Needs of foster parents, Foster parent role and personal approach to fostering, Family upbringing, Social work, Family relationships of foster parents, Obligations of foster parents, Personal qualities of the child, Risks and difficulties associated with foster care, and Feelings of foster parents* ([Suppl. Table S2](#)).

In this article, we will present and interpret the themes that contribute most to the achievement of the set research objectives and provide selected statements from communication partners.

Theme: Motivation for foster care

Drug addiction of foster parents' children or another family member emerged as an important motive for some communication partners who assumed a role of kinship foster parents: *“My daughter has been doing drugs all her life...”* (I2/I6); *“My youngest daughter, being the youngest of my three children, she has become a drug addict”* (I4/I3); *“X. has had problems since she was about 15. She was struggling with drugs, and then there was some prison involved...”* (I8/I3); *“My sister was doing drugs, the kids were in the children's home, so we just each took them”* (I6/I2).

The accumulation of biological parents' problems, the absence of housing, and also child neglect was something that

communication partners often talked about as part of the motivation leading to fostering: *"(...) often left the kids alone, didn't look after them, neglected their upbringing, and stuff like that"* (I4/6); *"Well then she started with drugs, not taking care of the boy, selling things off"* (I3/2); *"(...) so my daughter didn't have a place to live, and she could have lived with us, but she didn't manage"* (I8/5).

The interviewees' responses also revealed the risk of the child being placed in a children's home: *"I wouldn't put her in a home. My heart wouldn't let me"* (I2/8). Or the motivation of their love for children themselves: *"I was motivated by my grandchildren... I love them"* (I4/15); *"I cared about my granddaughter. I wouldn't have put her in a home"* (I2/74). The aforementioned motives relate only to kinship foster care.

Another motive for unmediated foster care was the desire to have a child, specifically: *"I see it as a miracle. Because we couldn't have children of our own"* (I1/100), and the replacing of the parental role: *"We actually approached it as, in a way, actually wanting to make up for our desire to be parents and to help someone at the same time"* (I1/47).

Theme: Needs of foster parents

This theme consists of a sub-category of personal needs and foster care related needs. The interviews analysis showed a significant need for respite among the communication partners: *"I don't have any time for myself, to rest"* (I2/126); *"One is up many times at night. I'm sleep deprived"* (I4/208); the need for time for oneself and being able to go out and socialise was also expressed: *"The needs – definitely... I wish to be more myself... to be able to go out more often"* (I2/121). Furthermore, the need for good health was mentioned: *"I want 'me' to stay healthy, so I get this boy ready for life"* (I9/122). One communication partner (I8/167) verbalised the need to resolve her relationship with her daughter: *"I don't know about the needs... maybe my daughter – I don't know how to deal with her, so she doesn't bother me all the time."*

The needs that can be included among those associated with foster care involved a need for better cooperation with social workers: *"Cooperation could have been better"* (I4/152). The need for financial assistance is significant; communication partners talked about in the context of the lack of funds – and not just at the beginning of foster care: *"The parents didn't give me any money, they didn't contribute anything. So, it was kind of bad"* (I2/13). In these cases, when financial assistance is needed, foster parents may have negative experiences as a result of its rejection. *"(...) then after all, financially it was already quite hard... I didn't even get any allowance for him, just nothing. (...) So, I applied for the first time, and they refused it, because we were supposedly direct relatives. Well, then I got angry"* (I9/7–9); *"(...) as for the allowance, when I applied for it, they didn't give it to me, because they also take my husband's salary into account, which I don't like at all"* (I2/54).

However, communication partners also talked about the absence of problems: *"... but like we don't struggle with anything with him"* (I1/80); *"All's fine, it's great. We don't have any problems; everything is running smoothly"* (I5/39); *"The kids are still little, so we don't have any problems yet"* (I5/69). The absence of actual needs was also mentioned in the interviews: *"Yeah, I guess I just don't have any specific needs as a foster parent"* (I1/93); *"So I don't really need anything"* (I4/132); *"None. I don't lack anything"* (I7/88); *"I don't even need anything yet"* (I7/108).

Theme: Foster parent role and personal approach to fostering

Several communication partners described the foster parent role as a kind of parental role, i.e., *"... they call us mum and dad"* (I5/12); *"... we view it [our role] as a family, as a parent, mother, father, it's normal"* (I5/52); *"And the little one calls me 'mum, dad'"* (I6/40); *"I'm a grandmother, but I'm still like something else besides that... like a parent (...) X. calls me 'mum, grandma'"* (I8/243–244); *"At one point he kept coming and calling me 'mum'. Because he wasn't sure whether to say mum or grandma"* (I9/18). We can see the difference between the statements made by the kinship foster parents and the non-kinship foster parent. The latter spoke about his parental role as follows: *"... in a way we actually want to make up for our desire to be parents and to help someone at the same time"* (I1/47), and then adds: *"... because we feel like parents"* (I1/49).

The interviews showed that communication partners saw the children as part of their family: *"I already take him as my child actually"* (I3/33); *"I'm glad that I have these children, yeah, they've actually been my children for the past 10 years, I've actually 'given birth' to them"* (I4/42); *"I might even miss them already; I'm used to them now"* (I6/42); *"We treat him as one of our own"* (I1/29). In non-kinship foster care we see the same attitude: *"Y. has our surname so that he feels, even at school for example, that he is one of us"* (I1/90); *"I think we try to do it as if we were raising our own child"* (I1/126).

Within the sub-category of expectations from fostering, the lack of expectations associated with entering fostering was mentioned: *"I didn't have any expectations. I didn't expect anything from it because I've actually been fostering her since she was a baby"* (I7/45), and also fulfilled expectations: *"I think like from our side the expectation or the fulfilment – it fulfils us"* (I1/55). One of the communication partners expresses a negative opinion about the assumption of care by grandparents as follows: *"Everybody or a child protection services agency rely on the parents to help their daughters, meaning the single mothers, but it can't work like that"* (I4/110).

Theme: Obligations of foster parents

Foster parents must undergo mandatory training, which is 24 hours per year during the course of foster care (Section 47a), Subsection 2f) of Act no. 359/1999 Coll., on the Social and Legal Protection of Children). Mediated foster care is also connected with the training of applicants before entering foster care: *"During this training, we were prepared for different situations that would arise"* (I1/33). One communication partner described the training content: *"... they also told us how we should approach the upbringing, and how we should communicate to the child what his/her situation was about"* (I1/34).

Communication partners reported the training benefit that attending it gave them; *"To unwind. Some trainings are interesting; they really are"* (I3/19); *"I get a bit of a break, relax. A change of environment. I would need that every week"* (I2/180); *"... that it's such a bonus, that maybe we get something out of it, that we broaden our perspective and receive some more information"* (I1/92). Other responses from communication partners also illustrate the inspiration they encounter during training: *"It's an inspiration. I like to hear what's coming up, but we'll see what's next"* (I5/76); *"During the training sessions we learn how things work elsewhere, getting an idea of what to expect"* (I5/32).

Discussion

The main objective of the research study was: *To examine the experiences of individuals in the process of providing foster care.* The main research question was: *“How do foster parents experience the process of providing foster care?”*

The main research question was divided into three sub-research questions.

1. *With what expectations do persons enter the process of providing foster care?*
2. *What are the motives of foster parents for providing foster care?*
3. *How are the needs of foster parents met in the process of providing foster care?*

We chose a qualitative research strategy, employing semi-structured interviews with foster parents in the Moravian-Silesian region to collect data. The data were analysed using the thematic analysis method.

Based on analysis of our research data, we found that an important motive for kinship foster care is the drug addiction of the foster parents' child and/or their family member. Another factor is their own children's problems, such as lack of housing or child neglect. In our research sample, there was an overly large proportion of communications partners who were kinship foster parents. Given this disproportion, we would like to point out that some of the identified motives and experiences, such as drug addiction of foster parents' children, problems of biological parents or need for financial assistance, may not be relevant to non-kinship foster care and cannot be generalised.

The authors Kušnířová et al. (2021) carried out mixed method research on the topic *“What needs do kinship foster parents have?”* Their research found that the most challenging time for kinship foster parents was the period before the start of foster care, when they felt time, moral, and informational pressures, and perceived minimal support for their future role as foster parents. At the same time, the research showed that foster parents did not regret their decision to foster and would not change it, despite all the difficulties and obstacles they faced. This was also confirmed by our research. The above-mentioned authors emphasise the need to address the needs of foster parents, describing the need for individualised education that is focused on the specific needs of both carers and children as essential in their findings. They also point to the need for support in relation to children's education and technology, given that many grandparents find it challenging to support their children in school and learning. They also note the need for support in coping with possible fears about the future. The need for training for foster parents, as well as uncertainty and associated fears about the future, were also reflected in our research.

In the course of foster care, especially if it is long-term, the preferences of foster parents' needs may change over the course of their lives. In this context, we should therefore not forget about meeting the developmental and educational needs of foster parents, which were also frequently mentioned by communication partners in our research. These may positively contribute to their motivation for fostering (Akin et al., 2017; Herbert and Kulkin, 2018; Randle et al., 2018).

Research by Randle et al. (2018) entitled *“What can agencies do to increase foster carer satisfaction?”* focused on foster parent satisfaction. The results identified three factors contrib-

uting to foster parent satisfaction. These are “role demands” (training, legal issues), “social services support” (help from an accompanying organisation, meeting other foster parents), and “personal needs” (financial assistance, relationship with biological family). Here we find a similar correlation with the findings of our research, which also shows the need for training, social services support, the benefits of meeting other foster parents, inspiration sharing, and personal needs related to financial assistance and improving the relationship with the biological family.

SocioFactor, together with the Psychological Support Centre, implemented research within a project entitled *“Kinship foster care”*. The aim was to identify the needs of foster parents in kinship foster care. The authors identified the specific needs of kinship foster parents along with the corresponding recommendations. For example, the research revealed the need to alleviate fears about the future, which stemmed from the fact that some of the foster parents felt worried about whether they would be able to care for their children until they reached adulthood, as well as concerns about the children's educational problems, puberty, and general concerns about the minors' future. The authors recommend sharing fears about the future, discussing them with a key worker accompanying the family, and preparing for the future – as well as for potential crisis moments in parenting (SocioFactor, 2021). In our research, communication partners frequently mentioned an uncertain future and associated fears. They talked about this topic in the context of wondering what will happen later: how the children will behave when they grow up, whether the children will long for their biological parents, etc. Therefore, we also believe that sharing and discussing these concerns can help foster parents alleviate their fears to better prepare for the future.

The responses of the communication partners implied a desire to be initiators of their own actions to achieve a sense of competence and to establish reliable relationships based on feelings of affection and belonging. The need for competence alone is not sufficient to maintain a high level of inner motivation, although it is also important. The need for connection with others is a prerequisite for the successful formation and functioning of the need for self-determination, as demonstrated by R. Ryan in special studies (children who feel connected to others have a highly developed and highly effective level of autonomy). In relation to foster parents, this may mean, for example, that foster parents who feel autonomous in making decisions about their child's care are more likely to have long-term engagement and a sense of fulfilment from this role. If these universal needs are met, the theory argues that people will tend toward optimal growth and realise their own potential to achieve their goals. From the interviews with communication partners and their subsequent analysis, there was a significant interconnection between internal motives and external motives. It appeared that motivation for foster care may primarily stem from internal motives such as altruism, as e.g., noted by Costa and Tasker (2018), or secondarily may be activated and sustained by some external incentives, such as an economic incentive (Nakonečný, 2017).

In McClelland's theory of three types of motivation (Madsen, 1972), the need for affiliation stood out in particular, manifesting in foster parents' desire for establishing and maintaining friendly and warm relationships with other people. This need may contribute to creating positive relationships and supporting children in substitute family care. On the contrary, the need for power may play an important role in their efforts to bring about changes in the childcare system or to address problems in the community.

The essence of Victor Vroom's expectancy theory is that a person's final decision is always underpinned by his or her expectations of what outcomes his or her decision will bring (Armstrong, 2002). This was reflected in our research. In identifying and analysing the expectations with which foster parents entered into foster care, it can be concluded that among these expectations, "grandchild motivation" was often mentioned by foster grandparents.

The research confirmed the diversity of foster parents' needs, ranging from training for foster parents to assistance from social workers in the social care system.

Research limitations include the fact that the research sample may have been biased by disproportionate representation of men and women, disproportionate type of foster care, different lengths of foster care, and the specificity of the region in which the research was completed. Including communication partners from only one region may distort the results of the research, as the socio-demographic and economic conditions of the Moravian-Silesian Region, e.g., higher unemployment, specific social structure, etc., differ from other regions of the Czech Republic. Specific conditions may influence not only the motivation for foster care but also the dynamics of care. For example, there may be greater dependence on local programs, availability of care, etc. Therefore, the research findings cannot be generalised to the national level. Due to the high proportion of kinship foster parents, our comparison of results with non-kinship foster care is considerably limited, as the experiences between these two groups may differ. Without further research, our conclusions cannot be extrapolated to other groups. It would therefore be appropriate to expand the research to include additional comparative groups, longitudinal data, and to ensure the representativeness of the sample across regions according to type of care, length of experience, age of foster parents, education, etc.

Only one man was represented in the research. Women may perceive their motivations, expectations, and needs in fostering differently than men. The difference in these perceptions might also have been reflected in the type of foster care, as only one informant of mediated (non-kinship) care was included in the research sample. The qualitative data analysis showed that the "desire to have a child" motive emerged as significant for non-kinship foster care, which herein was associated with the inability to have a child of their own. Zezulová (2012) is inclined to the view that the desire to have a child is a decisive motive that should be present in foster care applicants, and that another strong motive tends to be helping abandoned children. It is a well-known fact that the Moravian-Silesian region has long been one of the Czech regions with higher unemployment rates, lower average incomes, higher rates of social exclusion, etc. The combination of these factors leads, among other things, to a concentration of areas with socially vulnerable families, where problems such as addiction, crime rate, and/or child neglect are more frequent. In particular, drug addiction was an important theme in our research for the motivation leading to foster care on the part of the children's parents (biological parents).

To further investigate this issue, we would therefore suggest selecting a more diverse sample of communication partners, including different geographical areas and cultural backgrounds. In this way, the different contexts influencing foster care can be better understood. In subsequent follow-up research, we recommend applying a quantitative research strategy, namely a questionnaire survey, which would focus on obtaining data from a broad sample of foster parents, from different regions, of different ages, gender, education

background, and socioeconomic status in order to obtain a representative sample that would allow for generalisation of the results. In the context of the topic addressed, it could be beneficial and interesting if such research focused on the motivational patterns of those involved in foster care, particularly as these patterns may provide deeper, embedded patterns of thinking and behaviour, which could help to better target the care provided, including capturing differences between various socio-demographic groups. The thematic analysis (with an awareness of the subjectivity of the communication partners' accounts), suggests, to some extent, a combination of several motivational patterns: protective pattern (especially in the sense of a tendency to create a safe and stable environment and to stand up for the rights and needs of a child), emotional pattern (a strong need for emotional fulfilment through childcare and the creation of deep emotional bonds by providing unconditional love and acceptance), compensatory pattern (tendency to project one's own unmet needs into childcare and strive to provide a better childhood than the foster parents themselves had), altruistic pattern (especially in the need to help and care for others and the tendency to put the child's needs before one's own), professional pattern (especially in the perception of fostering as a life mission, as well as in the systematic approach to developing parenting skills and the willingness to learn), and finally growth pattern (the perception of fostering as an opportunity for personal growth, the willingness to learn from challenging situations in terms of overcoming obstacles or adapting to the changing needs of the child).

Conclusion

The thematic analysis identified 11 themes that emerged from the data analysis. As part of the identification, description, and analysis of motivations for foster care, we identified several motivations that led to entry into foster care. These included motivations for foster care by foster parents and by the children's biological parents. Preparation for foster care was associated with entry into foster care. This included the decision-making process as well as the demands and challenges associated with this preparation. Both the motivations for foster care and the actual preparation led to the creation of the foster parent role and a personal approach to foster care. This was a theme that linked the narratives of all communication partners. It was the perception of oneself in the foster parent role that was key here. This theme also involved a sub-theme of expectations from foster care. The expectations with which persons enter the process of providing foster care provision were investigated in the first sub-research question.

The foster parents faced all kinds of risks and difficulties associated with foster care, as well as health and psychological problems. They dealt with the often-challenging family relationships, both between foster parents and their fostered children, and especially with the foster parents' own children. This affected the role of foster parents and their personal approach to foster care. The theme of fostering was related to the communication partners' statements when describing the child's upbringing. They emphasised the children's good future, personality growth, and/or described their fostered child's upbringing from birth. Various personality traits of the child were also mentioned, which included the children's interests, concerns, trust, and/or attention seeking.

To cope with the challenging situations that emerged and everything that foster parents had to deal with in relation to foster care, they were given an option to use the help and sup-

port of social work; either from an accompanying organisation or from the child protection services agency. Another option available to foster parents was foster parent training, which is also one of their obligations. This included preparation for foster care and/or inspiration from others. Other obligations included administrative necessities. Social work and the responsibilities of foster parents also focused on their foster role and helped to shape it.

The second sub-research question focused on the motives of foster parents for providing foster care. Both external and internal motifs appeared here. Drug addiction of foster parents' children (or another family member) emerged as one of the important motives for foster care for some communication partners who assumed a role of kinship foster parents. Another motive for unmediated foster care was the desire to have a child and the acceptance of the parental role as a form of compensation.

The third sub-research question focused on meeting the needs of persons carrying out foster care. The research revealed a diversity of foster parent needs, which were both personal and foster care related.

All this led to the emergence of certain feelings of the foster parents, which included, for example, joy at the children's presence, concern about the children, or exhaustion.

Through our main research question, we examined the experiences of individuals in the process of providing foster care. Kinship foster parents were significantly represented in our research sample. They often entered into care under moral pressure because they had to replace "failing" parents. They had a prior emotional bond with the child, which can, for example, have a divergent effect on parenting compared to non-related foster parents in a number of contexts, who build this emotional bond with the child over time. These differences can manifest themselves in different ways, for example, when dealing with children's personal problems, their experiences of trauma, etc. We are primarily referring here to different degrees of objectification of perception, i.e., what may appear to be more or less important from the perspective of caregivers. This can, for example, influence the educational approach to children and lead to different emphases on various aspects of objective reality.

Increasing the interest in substitute family care and foster care is crucial for the successful application of Act no. 363/2021/Coll. and for ensuring the well-being and development of children in substitute families. Based on the results of our research, we have made a series of recommendations to increase interest in foster and substitute family care (Suppl. Table S3).

Ethical aspects and conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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