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Needs Analysis for a Parental Guidance Program for Biological Family: Spain's Current Situation

Angels BALSELLS¹; Pere AMORÓS²; Nuria FUENTES-PELAEZ³; Ainoa MATEOS⁴

Abstract

One of the current characteristics of child protection in Spain is the priority that we try to give to the socio-educative action with the biological family when the measure of kinship foster care is applied to achieve family reunification. In this paper the results related to the biological family, the risk and protection factors and its needs of socio-educative support are presented. They are the result of two⁵ consecutive studies carried out by the GRISIJ⁶ in which the educative needs with regard to Kinship foster care are analysed. The research compiles the information of 145 professionals of child protection in the Spanish territory distributed in 20 discussion groups. The qualitative results have been analysed by means of the content analysis technique. The results show the factors that can be favourable in a process of reunification of the child and of support. To highlight: a) the quality and frequency of visits and meetings; b) the quality of the relationship between the foster family and the biological family; c) the relationship between the biological family and the fostered child – affective bonds -: d) the

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⁵ Results presented are part of two broader studies funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology of Spain (BSO-02264, SEJ-02657/EDU).

⁶ GRISIJ: Research Group on Child and Youth Social Educative Interventions.

reunification factors – involvement in the parental role and in motivation; e) the socio-educative support and the official and non-official resources, and f) the biological families' guidance needs.

Keywords: kinship foster care; biological family; family protection; guidance needs; parental guidance program.

The Situation of Infancy Protection in Spain

The care of children in an unprotected situation is, nowadays, a political commitment of the Spanish State and of the Autonomous Governments and, at the same time, it is a commitment of the citizens and the social and professional institutions connected with infancy. The 1978 Spanish Constitution also sets forth its commitment with the family in article 39 that states that “children will receive the protection according to the international agreements that watch over their rights”. Undoubtedly, as a consequence of this commitment, the 1/1996 Law states in its second article “the top priority of children’s interests above any other legitimate interest that could exist”. As well, the previous 21/1987 Law also lays great stress on child protection in negligent situations, where children “are deprived of the essential moral or material care”.

The legal system in the 1/1996 law provides and states a series of measures depending on the circumstances and preventive measures. The protection measure to be taken in each case will depend on, on the one hand, if we are faced with a situation of risk or abuse already carried out, and, on the other hand, on the preventive measures that can be established taking into account the future relationships that the children affected can have with their parents.

When the children’s or adolescents’ needs are not appropriately met or are in serious danger of being neglected, it is the moment for the family intervention programs or family treatment programs to start working as they have an essentially educative and healing purpose to be able to keep the family together, avoiding the children’s separation from their homes. When “the seriousness of the events recommends the infant’s separation from the family” (explanatory preamble 1/1996 Law) we find ourselves in front of a *helpless situation*, that is described as that in which “it is caused by the failure or the impossible or inappropriate exercise of the protection duties established by the laws for the children’s guardianship, when they are deprived of moral or material necessary attendance” (fifth final provision of the 1/1996 Law that changes the 172 article of the Civil Code).

In our current system the *kinship foster care*, with which a substitution of the original family environment is looked for, the following basic characteristics are established: “the kinship foster care permits the total participation of the child in the life of the family and imposes on those who receive him/her the duty of

providing care, food, education, keeping him/her company and an integral education” (Sixth final provision of the 1/1996 Law that changes the 173 article of the Civil Code.

According to the last official data, in Spain there are 30,191 children under the Social work services protection (Health and Social Policy Ministry, 2008). If we compare these data with those of other countries, we can observe that the child protection system in Spain is characterized by three facts (Palacios and Jiménez, 2009): Firstly, residential care is used in 75% of cases as a measure when a child is taken from his/her biological family; secondly, international adoptions are much higher than national ones and, thirdly, the kinship foster care amounts to 85% of fostering care.

The current problem is that both the kinship family care and the residential care require a socio-educative cooperation with the biological family to make reunification of child placed in foster care easier, a matter pending in Spain. Recently, a clear political, scientific and professional demand for an answer to this situation has come up: to give priority to actions with the biological family by means of parental guidance programs that improve and strengthen the parental skills and favour the child’s reunification.

This concern for the change in the protection policies is present in recent policies; the Spanish Senate has published “The special commission report on the study of the problems of national adoption and other related issues” (17/11/2010) in which recommendations addressed to the creation of programs of intervention with the family are included to try the natural integration of the child in his/her family. (Recommendation no.21). Furthermore, the passing of the 1/1996 Constitutional Law, of 15 January of The Child Legal Protection establishes that the development of the child in his/her family is a fundamental right and states that, in case of separation, priority should be given to his/her own family for a reunification process, and two years are established for the biological family to change the circumstances that led to the child’s placement. Therefore, the family involvement in the reunification has been backed up when the child has been separated from his/her family and there is a priority to support this reunification. This is also one of the objectives and actions of the Infancy and Adolescence Strategic National Plan (2006/2009) passed by the Council of Ministers on 16 June, 2006 based on the exchange of information, cooperation and the adoption of common action criteria between the different administrations and work teams in the infancy field, as well as in the prevision of problems and new challenges.

Furthermore, all this goes in parallel with the 21st century European society that has the new challenge of emerging from a global questioning of protection measures and of a new evaluation of the biological families; the European Council adopted the 19 (2006) Recommendation of the Ministerial Committee of the State Members concerning support policies towards the positive exercise of parenthood: *“to provide parents with enough support mechanisms for them to be able to take*

over their responsibility for the bringing up and education of their children". In the case of parental exercise in social alienation or in risk of social alienation it is advised to support the parents and allow them to acquire the necessary skills to carry out their responsibilities towards their children; to create a trusting relationship with the families and to permit the parents to regain control of their own lives; to organize a combined training for the professionals and the parents to achieve a better mutual understanding of the situation; to create a common project that favours the children's well-being and that allow professionals to know about these families.

Key Factors in Family Reunification

Risk and protection factors in the family reunification process

This research has shown that certain risk factors are negatively related to the reunification process; for example, some scientific studies indicate drug abuse as a reunification risk (Brook & McDonald, 2007; Miller et al., 2006). Drug problems generally coexist with mental health, parental competences, criminal activities and domestic violence problems, thus, all these factors reduce the reunification probabilities (Choi & Ryan, 2007; Maluccio & Ainsworth, 2003; Marsh, Ryan, Choi & Testa, 2006; Miller, Fish, Fetrow & Jordan, 2006). Another risk factor is the children's hostile attitude towards visits and the reunification perspective (Cojocaru, D. 2009) in those cases in which the family history has been especially traumatic.

A risk factor in cases of kinship foster care that does not exist in the case of non-related care or in residential placement is the length and stability of the measure; this can be justified by a) that parents agree and show satisfaction and relief with the measure: b) because the pressure on the social services is reduced and c) because it is seen as a valid alternative for the children (Del Valle, López, Montserrat & Bravo, 2010). All these factors have a negative influence on the reunification objective.

In contrast to the study of risk factors, some studies are also trying to find those protection factors that help in the success of the reunification process. The aim is to find the strength and abilities that allow families to lead a successful life: the social support, the flexibility, the communication, the attitude and the capacity to interpret their own difficulties, the initiative to meet the family's needs, the willingness and the spirituality (DeFrain & Asay, 2007; Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Lietz & Strength, 2011; Lietz, 2006, 2007). There is a particularly relevant factor in family reunification: Lietz & Strength (2011) analyse a group of families that have achieved successfully their objectives for the reunification and observe that

the commitment, the willingness to accept and carry out the necessary changes in order to regain their children's tutelage, as well as the family's unquestionable commitment and willingness to live together again are very important for the reunification. This fact is also confirmed in Amorós, Palacios, Fuentes, León and Mesas (2003). In this respect, the importance of attitude has been highlighted, the awareness of the problem and the motivation for the change of the vulnerable families in any working process for the improvement of parental skills. (Rodrigo, Camacho, Máiquez, Byrne, Benito, 2009; Rodrigo, Martín, Máiquez, Rodríguez, 2007; Balsells, 2007).

A key element in the study of the reunification is the contact between the children and their parents during the separation from the family. Several studies relate the probability of reunification with the quality and frequency of the visits and the contact during the separation time; children who have more contact with their biological parents have a higher probability of reunification (Landsverk, Davis, Ganger, Newton & Johanson, 1996; Cleaver, 2000; Testa and Shook, 2002; Leon y Palacios, 2004). Despite that, there are differences in the reunification probability according to the type of protection measure in which the child is in (Berrick, Barth & Needell., 1994; Le Prohn, 1994; Pecora, Prohn & Nasuti, 1999). The number of reunification of families with children under non-related care is higher than in the families with children in kinship foster care. According to Del Valle et al. (2010) one of the reasons the authors defend is that parents are more reluctant to cooperate with the return of the children because they are satisfied with their children staying with their relatives. In that sense some authors (Testa y Shook, 2002; Leon and Palacios, 2004; Cleaver, 2000; Landsverk et al., 1996) have shown that parents' visits are a prediction factor of the reunification success. However, in the case of kinship foster care it has also been observed that the relationship between the biological family and the foster family has a direct influence on the quality of the visits and in the possible reunification; in a study carried out in Romania (Cojocaru, 2009b) several related factors were explored: the hostile behaviour of the biological family, their lack of interest and the avoidance of responsibility are the risk factors that the foster families reported; while the favourable attitude of the foster family towards the biological family is shown as a protective factor.

The socio-educative support and the guidance needs of the biological families

Consequently, it is known that the involvement of the family in its process of rehabilitation is essential for reunification success; so, to achieve the reunification it is essential to work with the family from the first moment of the separation. How should this socio-educative work be achieved? What guidance needs do the biological families have? The researchers have found some key factors, for example, the acceptance of the protection measure, the involvement in the decision-

making and the evaluation of the families to find their potentialities to promote their parental skills are some of the aspects of the research (Budd y Holdsworth, 1996; Del Valle, Bravo, and Lopez, 2009; Amorós and Palacios, 2004; Testa and Shook, 2002; Amorós et al., 2003). The need to consider the time of separation as a co-parental time and not as a time of substitution of the biological family also appears as a necessary approach to favour reunification (Cojocar, 2009; del Valle and Fuertes, 2007). For Rodrigo et al (2009: 95): “the key of the intervention in the risk contexts is to promote a minimum parental adaptation, not an optimum parenthood based on models of parenthood without risk”.

One of the most difficult questions in the approach to working with these families is to get them to cooperate with the professionals: in a separation situation the parents' reaction can be of fury and hostility towards the system and the professionals involved. But, paradoxically, the way in which the professional has established a relationship with the family, be it one of cooperation or one of control, and of how the professional considers the intervention (Woodcock, 2003), the dependence on the professional and/or the lack of cooperation with the Social Services and even the opposition to the intervention (Balsells, 2007; Dumbrill, 2006) are factors that determine the success of reunification. It seems that to explain the reasons of the separation, to promote realistic expectations about the contacts and visits, and what is done for parents to take part in the decision-making are valid approaches to get the cooperation and, consequently, to work towards the reunification from the first moment. (Amorós y Palacios, 2004).

From this new point of view of biological families a change is considered from a lack of perspective to a potentialities perspective: that is, not only to look for the risk factors that put a family in a situation of parental “incapacity”, but to look also for the protection factors that identify the capacities and strong points that most of these parents have (Amorós, Balsells, Fuentes-Peláez, Molina, Mateos & Pastor, 2011). Consequently, the existing studies already state how the intervention methodologies and the support to the families have started to consider this matter from the family preservation and from participative approaches (Tempel, 2010; Rodrigo et al., 2009; Rodrigo, Máiquez, Byrne, Rodríguez, Martín, Rodríguez and Pérez, 2008; Cojocar, D., 2011). The holistic and positive approach to family intervention will need the support of the families, the reinforcement of the educative function, the attention to the children's needs and the promotion of the family's resilience.

To favour the reunification, the support to the families must be based on strict, complex approaches implemented during the necessary time and well coordinated, so that the fragility and complexity of the problems of these families are attended so that parental skills can improve.

Arruabarrena (2009) states that in general terms the parental guidance programs – in case of abuse and negligence – the best results obtained are those that a) have a cognitive-behaviourist guidance, b) that are integrated into other resources, c) that involve coordinated action with the parents, the children and the support means, and d) that develop a part of the intervention at home.

Other studies recommend including the necessary services diversification programs to improve the quality of the family system and the parental skills of the biological families through parent groups that deal with the attitudinal and emotional questions, the skills and the competences to look after their children equally (Amorós, ; Jiménez ; Molina; Pastor, Cirera, Martín, D. et al.. 2005; Cojocaru, S., 2009; Cojocaru, S., 2008; Balsells, Fuentes-Pelaez, Mateo, Mateos and Violant, 2010). Finally, it is to be highlighted that the scientific studies have also revised the phases during which the reunification has to be worked on, to show clearly that it is not only during the period of separation, but also on the previous phase of the establishment of the measure and during the separation. Even in the phase after the family reunification there is the need to maintain the socio-educative support to the family to be sure that the parents' and children's needs are met, as they are especially fragile: statistics show that the cases that go back to the protection system after the reunification are between 15% and 35% (Amorós and Palacios, 2004).

Research Approach

As can be observed in the theoretical discussion, the complexity of the biological families and of the processes to achieve the reunification show the need to continue with studies that deepen our awareness of this issue. The GRISIJ team has carried out two consecutive studies, financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology, in which the guidance needs related to the measure of Kinship Foster care are analysed. The findings obtained related to the biological family and the risk and protection factors, as well as the results related to their socio-educative and support needs, as presented below. With this we try to have a greater understanding of the needs and processes of the biological families whose children are in kinship foster care, and to give some keys to contextualise a parental guidance program in Spain that helps to achieve the challenge that our child protection system has.

Participants

145 professionals in the field of infancy protection participated in the study from 8 Autonomous Communities⁷ from all over the Spanish territory; Asturias, The Canary Islands, Castile-La Mancha, Galicia, Balearic Islands, La Rioja, and Madrid.

The participating professionals were nominated by the heads of each Community and it was done on the basis of the characteristics agreed upon in the project: a) professionals with different qualifications, b) working in child protection services, c) with experience in kinship foster care and interested in participating, d) belonging to the child protection professional teams from the 8 communities of the Spanish territory with which agreements for the research were established.

The characteristics of the 145 participating professionals in the research are: a higher number of females than males: 77% women, 23% men. They are professionals with extensive experience in child protection (49% have more than 11 years' experience and 23% more than 5). With regard to qualifications: 53% of the professionals are graduates in Psychology and 34% graduates in Social Work, with the rest having degrees in various subjects (including Educational Science and Social Education).

Data gathering tools

To gather the data the focus group technique was used and issues related to kinship foster care were dealt with following written criteria. The tools used to gather the data were three:

1. Identifying card with the participants basic data (age, sex, years of experience and university degrees)
2. Guidance of questions for the development of the discussion group
3. Summary card for the discussion group in which aspects related to the development of the group were registered: date, length, place, motivation, cohesion, atmosphere, group dynamics and how the questions worked.

Process and analysis

20 discussion groups were formed. Two researchers from the team travelled to each office of the experts of the Social Services; one researcher had the role of moderator, while the other was in charge of the logistics and recording the discussion following the written criteria. Each discussion group was recorded with the agreement of those present and with a confidence agreement. All the

⁷ An Autonomous Community is a territorial entity according to the constitutional legislation in Spain.

information was recorded and literally transcribed. As the data gathered was generally qualitative, the process used to analyse the information was the content analysis by the preparation of codes to be evaluated by different judges. The analysis code recognised six dimensions: a) visits and meetings, b) relationship between the biological family and the foster family – (b1) difficulties and (b2) overcoming strategies-, c) relationship between the biological family and the fostered child – (c1) advantages and (c2) difficulties – d) reunification factors, e) socio-educative support to the biological families and f) biological families' guidance needs.

Results

Risk and protection factors for family reunification: the visits, the relationship with the foster family and the relationship with the child in care

Our results have allowed us to identify three aspects as protection and/or risk factors in family reunification: the visits, the relationship with the foster family and the relationship with the fostered child. The quality and the frequency of visits and meetings between the children in foster care and their biological family is a key factor that has appeared in all the discussion groups. It has been observed that the frequency, the place and the modality (supervised visits or not) are characteristics that are controlled and organized by the Social Services according to the biological family's involvement.

*“Parents cannot take their child with them when they wish, it is the tutelage commission from the Community of Madrid who decides if they can or cannot...”
(Experts from Alcalá de Henares)*

Although visit rules are decided according to the biological family's involvement and the advantage for the fostered child, there are also cases in which the relationship between the foster family and the biological family is a very important variable in decision-making. Visits can be cancelled when a strong conflict and hostile behaviour between both is observed.

“The relationship between the biological family and foster family; its consequences” (Experts from la Rioja).

The role of the foster family during the visits and the meetings is of great importance in the acceptance and in the development of the same, as they have control functions and establish the limits to look after the repercussions on the fostered children's visits. However, it is observed that although all decisions are made by the Social Services team, foster families usually make decisions in many

situations. All this has a direct influence on the biological family's participation and in the relationship that it establishes with the foster family.

“ You have the agreement with the tutelage commission with regard to this foster care, (...) you do not only have rights (...) the duty to prevent any contact of the child with his parents that is not previously established in the fostering agreement” (Experts from Alcalá de Henares).

The relationship between the foster family and the biological family and the quality of the relationship between the two families of the fostered child can be a risk or a protection factor for the family reunification. In cases in which the relationship is one of understanding and cooperation, and in which the foster family has a positive opinion of the biological family a beneficial situation is created for an affective and relationship building atmosphere. The cooperation between the families is important as a protection factor in the reunification process; from the moment in which the provisional separation is decided and they want to work for the return of the child in foster care to his/her biological family, it is fundamental that the fostering process be developed in a family cooperation context. When foster families come to an agreement with biological families, respect the personal difficulties and show a positive attitude they become a support for the biological families in their change process.

“Parents' cooperation with foster families to make the child's return to the biological family easier” (Experts from Alcorcón).

“The personal relationship between the two families, the foster family and the biological family, stating the occurrence, the type, the frequency and the positive and negative consequences for the child” (Experts from La Rioja).

On the other hand, when in the relationship there is rivalry, lack of understanding and feelings of tension, there is a potential risk factor. The biological parents can see the foster parents as rivals that can monopolize the children's affection; the carers can have negative feelings towards the biological parents to whom they consider responsible for the problems and difficulties their children are going through. Both possibilities appear in the experts' discussion groups.

“How can the relationship between the carers and the parents be carried out? Reproaches appear” (Experts from Ciudad Real).

“The harm that the image of the carers suffers when they are slandered by the child's parents in front of a group of neighbours” (Experts from Las Palmas de G.C.).

Facing these different situations, the relationship difficulties that can arise during the fostering process and observing that these relationships are an important variable for the child's well-being, the experts state the need to do monitoring work with the families to help them.

“To teach the carers not to discredit or to speak ill about the biological parents in front of the child” (Experts from La Rioja).

“Some grandmothers need technical support to handle in the best way possible the relationship with their children, that could be solved with a clarification of roles and would improve their relationship with the fostered child” (Experts from Seville).

“To prepare the carers for the separation moment (in the case of the child's reintegration in the nucleus of his/her biological family) and the need to avoid negative interference when the child is living with his/her parents” (Experts from La Rioja).

The relationship of the biological family with the carers has many dimensions but the affective bond is the most relevant aspect as it influences in the reunification; when the parents and their children maintain positive contact that favours an affective implication reunification is more probable.

“Visits as a link with the biological family and a valuable instrument for reunification” (Experts from Las Palmas).

This affective link moves biological families towards a change process, towards the wish and the active willingness to take initiatives and carry out the necessary changes to make reunification easier. This factor is especially important because in the case of family reunification the commitment and the wish to be together again are considered a resilience factor. It has been identified as a necessary condition that appears among the experts' opinions:

“Another aspect that has to be taken into account is the existing wish for the child to return to his/her home” (Experts from La Rioja).

However, when the family history has been especially traumatic the relationship between the fostered child and his/her biological family is difficult to reconstruct. There are cases in which the fostered child has feelings of fury and refuses his/her biological family. This hostile attitude from the children towards their parents is a risk factor, as it makes the affective link necessary for the child's return to his/her home more difficult.

“Emotional relationships with parents, the caregivers, with the rest of the family” (Experts from Castilla la Mancha).

In the kinship foster cases it is possible that biological families can adapt to the fact that their children stay with their relatives. This risk factor towards family reunification can be explained because the parents agree with the measure and live it with a certain satisfaction and tranquillity. With this what we get is that parents have less pressure and do not make any effort to get their children back.

Biological families’ guidance and socio-educative needs to favour the reunification

Our results have also allowed us to identify, in an emerging way, some support and guidance needs of the biological families according to the opinion of the experts who participate in the discussion groups.

A holistic family involvement approach to favour the reunification in the kinship foster care must take into account all the network of support to the families, as well as another network of psycho-educative approaches so that parents learn to carry out their educative function and to meet their children’s needs.

When we find ourselves with cases of biological families with many personal, social and psychological problems, we must have an approach from support services that help them to overcome these difficulties and/or accompany them in their parental responsibilities. In the discussion groups, the most recurrent personal problems that led to the placement were drug abuse, alcoholism, health problems and social precariousness. All these problems are evidence of the chronic instability in the labour, financial, housing and social aspects that generally prevent the biological family from caring for their children. A new approach that provides an integrated and coordinated social support to overcome this problem is required.

“Role of management and technicians to report the required technical intervention” (Experts from Asturias).

But it has also been proved that for parents to take on their responsibilities related to the raising of their children a teaching-learning structure must be created to promote the necessary parental skills for them to assume their role. That is, specific guidance to develop the parental skills is needed. What are the biological families’ guidance needs?

Firstly, and in relation to the support networks that have just been mentioned, it seems natural to think that one guidance need will be the awareness and the strategies of access to the formal and non formal support networks available to the

biological family. Secondly, the affective link need has repeatedly appeared: biological parents have to adopt the appropriate strategies to meet their children's emotional and affective needs, so as to increase their love and affection towards their children. The satisfaction of the affective needs has a decisive part in the children's self-esteem and self-opinion, and, furthermore, it is the necessary basis to create a good family atmosphere.

Thirdly, there is a great variety of needs that could be treated as communication skills; as in the previous case, the communication between parents and their children make it easier to know the children better and, thus, know their needs, but, furthermore, at present it is understood as a very important protection factor for family resilience.

Other training needs are related to the involvement of the parental role; it has been proved as one of the main needs, as biological families can have a not very clear perception of their role and, in general, do not become very involved in the educative task as they delegate their responsibility in their children's well being. This is one of the most common reasons that cause the separation from the family nucleus and, therefore, it is a potential formative dimension. Especially in this case, it will not be enough to work to modify their behaviour or abilities, but it will have to be dealt with from an emotional dimension that enables them to adjust their involvement with their responsibilities. In the experts' opinions the co-parenthood between the two families appears as a feature to promote this role:

“The relationship with the biological parents and their involvement to assume their responsibilities as parents” (Experts from Las Palmas).

“(...) all the parts involved should support it , by means of agreements between the kinship foster family, the biological parents, the experts and the child if necessary”(Experts from Las Palmas).

The guidance needs to establish a good educative relationship, contingent and adjusted to the children's needs. The educative models, the rules and the limits, how to favour the educative relationships based on communication and love are very important aspects of the family reunification.

Finally, another variety of guidance needs related to the biological parents' rights and duties has appeared. The family may not be aware of what the fostering measure involves, of which are their duties and rights; to establish a clear framework can favour the measure development and clarify part of the causes of the conflicts with the foster family.

“The parents have rights according to the law, it does not mean that a social worker insists on the mother meeting her child...the mother can meet her child” (Experts from Alcalá de Henares).

Conclusions

This research has proved some of the aspects in the scientific studies about family reunification, but it has also been able to find other relevant characteristics that can favour this process in the cases of kinship foster families.

When considering visits and meetings, the works by Testa and Shook (2002) or by Leon and Palacios (2004) show them as a reunification prediction factor; and have proved that the biological family can express their feelings or make less of an effort for reunification, as Del Valle et al. (2010) states. But it has also highlighted how the relationship between the kinship foster family and the biological family can be of great importance in the rules of visits. Therefore, an important development would be to include a variety of contents of work to be done with the biological families with the aim of improving and maintaining a positive relationship with the kinship foster family.

If we observe the risk factor for the reunification, our data have proved that hostile behaviour, lack of interest and not assuming their responsibilities are risk factors in the biological family, as it was also found in similar research by Cojocaru, D. (2009) in Romania. Drug abuse problems and other psychosocial problems have also appeared as causes for fostering that need the parents' active involvement to be changed (Choi & Ryan, 2007; Maluccio & Ainsworth, 2003; Marsh et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2006).

But the main findings have seen the protection factors, from a point of view in which we try to work with the biological families to strengthen them thinking towards reunification. Thus, it has been proved how commitment and willingness to accept and carry out the necessary changes in order to regain their children's tutelage have appeared in the experts' opinions, as well as the family's commitment and unquestionable wish to be together as Lietz & Strength, (2011) state.

These findings have important implications in practice; they have highlighted certain aspects that can favour the families' reunification and that can be of great help to the social and educative work with the biological families.

Taking into account both the results of our study and the research revised we can establish those aspects that should be dealt with from a socio-educative perspective in the programs for family support for the reunification: a) the affective link between the biological family and the fostered child; b) the communication between the biological family and the fostered child; c) the educative relationship between the biological family and the fostered child; d) the involvement in the parental role; e) the motivation of the biological family to become involved in the reunification process; f) the awareness of formal and non formal resources; g) the biological family's rights and duties; h) the relationship between the foster family and the biological family: the co-parenthood; i) the visits and meetings during the fostering process. The current challenge is that this

research gives us the basis for the preparation of parents guidance programs on the most sound and safe possible basis.

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