

Psycho Social Issues with Parenting Foster Children

Parvathy Vijayan

Master of Philosophy in Social Work,
Department of Sociology and Social work,
Christ Deemed to be University.

Abstract: Foster care is a system in which a child is temporarily look after by a state certified caregiver, who provide a family life and other basic necessities to children. This study aims to study the psycho social issues with parenting foster children. The purposive sampling was used and the sample consisted of 10 participants. The participants were various foster care families in Kerala. Semi structured interview was conducted based on an interview guide. Thematic analysis and case study were used to analyse the data. Data were categorized into 11 major themes, listed as Psychological issues faced by foster parents, Social issues faced by foster parents, Requisite skills, issues found in foster children, Parental concern among foster parents, supportive mechanisms, Hurdles of fostering, factors forces to continue fostering, Initial predicaments in fostering, Number of pre training sessions attended by foster parent, and number of time parent met child before fostering. Result of the study revealed the psychological issues faced by foster parents, how that affected their personal and professional life. The study also indicated the requirement of special training to foster parents for an effective fostering.

Keywords: *foster parent, psychological issues, social issues, foster children, social life.*

I. INTRODUCTION

As per the International Labour Organization (ILO), it is estimated that 120 million children engaged in work in the developing world. The shocking fact is not only the child labour, but children are facing other issues as well. An infringement of the basic rights of the child, it is also potentially damaging to educational, physiological and psychological development of the child. In these modern days, development is in its peak, but on one side we are witnessing with full of chaos, corruption, poverty, disasters, child abuses, molestations and sexual exploitations etc. Children, however, remain at risk. They are considered as one of the most vulnerable categories in society and subjected to exploitations too. In earlier days, orphan and street children are more subjected to this kind of inhuman activities. But now it's high time to think about the safety of children. Even though children are most sensitive, there is no mercy towards the level of violence that they have to suffer. It's a matter of shame that a democratic country like India has to witness these types of unblushing incidents today. In order to ensure the safety and protection of children government has introduced certain schemes, policies and acts too. Initially, government is provided with institutional care only for the protection of children, but later the different concept has emerged to ensure the Best Interest of the Child. Foster care was one of the best non-institutional family-based care for children nowadays. (Donell, Van, & Rosati, 2002). The primary caregivers play a vital role in developing a positive bond among children during their first year of life, and it is considered as the secure attachment between a primary caregiver and a child. The total development of a child highly depending on the intensity of attachment they got from the caregivers. Normally the reasons why parents love their children unconditionally is the instinctive drive to promote the relational environment that helps insecure attachment with the children (Cole, 2005). A child in a foster care usually lives on a temporary basis with an extended or unrelated family member. This is usually applicable for those children who are not legally eligible for adoption, or whose parents are not capable to take care of them because of diseases, death, family issues etc. But ultimately, this arrangement focuses on the reunification of the child with their birth parents when difficult circumstances improve (Sahni, 2016). Foster care is practised throughout the world, as the

number of abandoned and neglected children are increasing day by day. In a foster care system, foster parents officially accept the responsibility of taking care a child as per the order of children's court. These children are neglected by their own biological parents or unable to look after the child due to certain other issues (Mosimege & Snyders, 2018).

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the psychological issues faced by foster parents
2. To understand the parenting skills in managing problems of foster children
3. To assess how the social life of parents are affected by fostering children
4. To understand the supportive mechanism in managing foster children

III. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Foster care is regarded as the temporary care provided to those abandoned children and parents who were not able to take care of their children. The concept of foster care is an emerging idea in India. The number of foster children has been increasing day by day. But that much foster parents are not available to provide fostering. The existing parents were withdrawing fostering due to many issues. So, it was essential to identify the issues in detail which will motivate the future foster parents. It will also help to provide a family life to those abandoned children.

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

4.1 Psycho social issues of foster parents

Foster parenting is not an easy task. It is a great challenge for every foster parent's personal and professional life. There should be few things that every foster parent needs to carry in their mind. First, always keep in mind that every foster child who has been removed from one's care and protection so they have that frustration in their mind and obviously that will show to the new foster parents. Every parent are intended to provide a better life to the foster child, sometimes due to some circumstances parents forced to stop the fostering and later it leads them in distress, guilty, stress etc. and sometimes it is because of the child's behavioural or emotional issues fostering needs to stop, which also lead stress among parents (Buehler, 2003). A normal family atmosphere is not supported by the foster care system as children can shift from one setting to other with little notice. Most of the children in foster care are the victims of abuses, which exhibit more behavioural problems in future. Unfortunately, foster parents have to suffer all their frustrations and anger because the majority of them were unaware of the issues of children. For a parent, it is very difficult to love the child intentionally without expecting their affection. There is a high chance of occurring stress in parents due to the interference and observation of third parties such as social workers or the people from welfare agencies. Foster parent is facing not only the physical abuse from children but sexual as well. This can create severe mental or emotional distress in parent and may feel regret for their decision (Weinstein, 2001). Researchers found that majority of the fostering would end up before the completion of the contract. Most of the foster parents wish to bring a happy and secured life to a child, that is the main reason why parents are taking the initiatives. But some parents need to face issues from the very first day of their fostering and rest of them would face in the coming days. One of the major issues faced by the foster parent is lack of attachment and adapting issues in a foster child. The behavioural issues in a child can cause severe issues among foster parents, and also it can affect the whole family of the foster parent. Parents are ready to fulfil all their needs, but most of the time, children are demanding complex needs that are beyond the limits of foster parents. Aggression in children is another problem; it may become threat to the life of the foster parents (Hall, 2012). Researchers show that foster parent is not receiving enough acceptance and social respect since they are unconditionally loving and protecting them. All they are getting is negative attitude from the outside people, and also, they are getting a very low income. All these frustrations can lead the parent to quit from proving foster care (Brown & Calder, 1999).

4.2 Need of Parenting Skills

Fostering is not just parenting or giving temporary protection for children. It needs more commitment, patience, understanding and adjusting etc. Even though some parents have their biological child and having enough experience in parenting, are failed in managing foster children. On the other hand, some parents don't have any pre- experience but able to manage the children nicely. So, it is based on the extra skills possessed by each parent how they use in the apt situation. Communication is considered as one of the effective parenting skills a foster parent should have. An effective communication boosts the strength of foster parent-child relationship and also the proper communication with foster children's birth parents will ensure the better future of a child, thereby foster parent can promote the foster children's social, behavioural, emotional and mental stability. A foster parent should have the communication skill of intrapersonal, intrafamilial and interfamilial. It is essential to build a shared family identity that helps in getting relational satisfaction among family members, including the extended family members (Nelson, 2014). The duration of parent's training is important as it helps them to understand how to manage those foster children. A detailed training helps the parent to know the essentials skills needed for foster parents, and also helps to build self-esteem and confidence; thereby they can reduce the adverse circumstances (Diaz, 2017). The extra skills and vibrant personality of the foster parent plays a vital role in successful fostering. A foster parent must be a master in parenting. Majority of the children placed in foster care had experienced a lot of ups and downs in life. So, they will exhibit some strange behaviour and attitude. Because of these, it is said that generally, foster parents should possess problem-solving skills, and he/she should be aware of the child disciplines techniques. The foster parent must be able to develop a positive relationship with all the people connecting with foster children. A sense of humour is a basic skill needed for a foster parent because it will be helpful in a situation where children have mood swings. Basic education and stable financial background are essential for each foster parent. Especially extra technological knowledge will boost up the effectiveness of fostering through social media, interaction with the other foster families, proper updating on foster care system etc. Another key skill is self-awareness; every foster parent must know. If we don't know ourselves deeply, it is impossible to control others (Brown J. D., 2008).

4.3 Supportive mechanisms for foster parents

Researchers found that reading fictional and true stories about juvenile or young adult can give them insight into the inner thoughts of foster children. Most of the parents are stressed and worried about the children's attitude. So, if they read such stories that will make understand most of the issues and why children are behaving like so. Thus, the parent should read each story from that foster parent's perspective and understand what strategies or possible, supporting mechanisms they received to solve the issues (Baker, 2007). Researchers found that there are a number of elements required for a successful foster parenting. The parent's skills and abilities are considered to be the primary need for successful parenting. It helps the parent to cope up with the situation and manage children more easily. In order to understand the behaviour and nature of child, every parent should be informed about the history of the child, especially the health status. Foster parenting is ineffective without the support of community, family, fostering agency and individualized services (Brown J. D., 2008).

V. RESEARCH METHODS

5.1 Design of the study

This being a qualitative research, an exploratory research design was used for the optimization of data.

5.2 Pilot study

The pilot study was conducted with the officials who were working in the foster care department. It helped to identify the scope and issues faced by foster parents as well as to recognize the feasibility of the study.

5.3 Sampling

The research sample in this study includes 10 participants, who had been fostering for a minimum of six months. The universe of the study consists of foster care families in Kerala, and the population of the study consists of foster care families in Ernakulum and Trivandrum. Due to the confidentiality issue among foster parents, purposive sampling was used. Initially, respondent was contacted via telephone in order to take the permission for the interview. Both working and non-working respondents were there, so prior consent was taken.

5.4 Inclusion Criteria

- Foster parent had minimum six month of experience.

5.5 Exclusion criteria

- The study excluded foster parents who were Single.

5.6 Method of data collection

Semi-structured interview was conducted for data collection, which allowed to explore an in-depth knowledge about the key issues faced by foster parents. A one on one session conducted between foster parents and interviewer, which took more than 1 hour depends on the issues of foster parents. Unlike a structured questionnaire, semi-structured questionnaire helped the foster parents in explaining the issues clearly. The mode of conversation helped to bring that natural flow of discussions among foster parent and interviewer.

5.7 Tools for data collection

1. Socio-demographic Questionnaire
2. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

5.8 Pre-test

A pre-test was conducted among three foster parents in order to reduce the sampling error and formulate measures to address any limitations before carrying out the formal one.

5.9 Tool Validation

The tool was validated by four experts.

5.10 Data Collection Process

The data collection process initiated by taking permission from Research Conduct and Ethics Committee (RCEC), Christ (Deemed to be University). In order to identify the potential parents for the study, the researcher presented an official letter to the Department of Women and Child, Government of Kerala. They connected the researcher to concerned person, thereby obtained the prospective participants for the study. The participants were interviewed mostly at their homes as per their convenience and were informed about the confidentiality and privacy of the interview. All the audios were recorded with the permission of participants and assured the confidentiality. The identity of the foster parent or foster child were not mentioned in the transcripts.

5.11 Data analysis

Before the data analysis, objectivity ensured in order to get accurate results. The thematic analysis used for analysing the data. The process of data analysis began with the verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews,

which helped in getting accurate information without losing its essence. The transcribed interviews imported into Qualitative data analysis. The thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and the Atlas.ti data analysis software used to identify the various codes from the data. The data analysis followed the six phases of thematic analysis suggested by (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Familiarizing with data: As a part of familiarization, the researcher listened to the audio recordings of the interview. Then the recording was transcribed into texts. The transcribed text repeatedly read to get familiarity with the data.

Coding: Open coding was used that ensured the validity of the study. Then the data were deeply analysed, and tiny codes created.

Searching for themes: In this phase, all the different codes sorted into essential themes, by collating all the relevant coded data extracts. The researcher's thought process referred to the relationship between codes, themes and subthemes.

Reviewing of themes: This stage involved an intense reviewing of identified themes in that researcher checked which themes need to be refined, combine and discard. This stage involved two phases. In phase 1, themes were cross-checked with the coded extracts, and phase 2 included a generation of the thematic map, that ensured the accurate data fit into the themes.

Defining and naming themes: By identifying the real essence of the data, the researcher provided meaningful theme names and detailed analysis for each theme.

Writing up: In this final step of data analysis, the researcher transformed the analysis into an interpretable piece of writing with the help of extracted examples that related to the objectives, themes, and research questions.

VI. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In order to examine the psycho social issues in foster parents, ten parents were interviewed. The thematic analysis identified six main themes from the data; Requisite skills, Hurdles of fostering, Social issues, Psychological issues, Supportive mechanisms, Factors forces to continue fostering. The qualitative study helped in obtaining in-depth information about the issues of parents. Foster parents are facing so many other issues as well which can lead them to various psychological and social issues.

6.1 Hurdles of fostering

6.1.1 Humiliation

“I don't remember how many times I got insulted before people because of his stealing nature. Now I don't think so there will be any changes in his behaviour.” (R3)

Humiliation is generally to make someone feel ashamed. Foster parents were facing humiliation in each phase of fostering as the children had behavioural issues. Foster parent expected a foster child who had basic manners and etiquettes. The stealing, lying, sexual behaviour, aggression, and also the lack of basic etiquettes in foster children humiliated parents. Parents were helpless by realizing such issues in foster children. It directly affected the dignity of foster parents and parents were worried about the perception of people.

6.1.2 Emotional Instability

“Then he asked me if you don't have money why did you bring me here?” (R3)

Foster parents faced harsh and rude attitude from foster children as well as people from outside. Parents were emotionally worried by the rude attitude of foster children when they tried to scold or discipline them. Foster parents were not receiving any respect from foster children. Children were considering the foster parents, those who were responsible for taking care and for providing excellent education and for fulfilling their basic needs. People blamed foster parents due to the behavioural issues in children.

6.2 Psychological issues of foster parents

6.2.1 Depression

“I almost felt depressed because most of my husband’s relative already resisted me to provide fostering and beside that all I am tolerating all his tantrums. Sometimes I used to cry alone.” (R4)

It was found that old generation believed in blood relation. They tried to point out tiny issues in foster children as they had to prove their statement. Foster parent tried to suppress their emotions and feelings and found it difficult to share their issues with elder people as they had pre notion about foster children.

6.2.2 Anxiety

“I think my wife having problems than me. Nowadays she is easily getting irritated and overthinking about things.” (R8)

“I have an intension of providing him a bright future but unfortunately, he is not interested in studies. I am really anxious about his future. I think because of this over anxiety sometimes I felt distraction in my job and I am forgetting some words especially those we are using in our day to day life.” (R1)

Foster parents were anxious about the future of the child as they were providing temporary care for foster children. It was evident from the effort made by the foster parents that they were considering the children as their own child. As a result, they were worried about their future life. The poor academic performance was a notable reason for anxiety issues among parents. The safety and wellbeing of their biological children was another major reason for anxiety as the habits of children were easily get influence each other. As a result of overthinking about the foster child, the personal, as well as professional life of parents were affected.

6.3 Social issues faced by foster parents

6.3.1 Lack of social engagement

“.. It’s been long time we went for those function. Only a Sunday I am getting and even that is not enough to take care him.” (R1)

The behaviour of foster children was unpredictable, and the past experiences had a significant influence in their behaviour. Most of the children were coming from a low-income family background and denied the parental care. It was not possible to understand the child within few months. So, the foster parent was required to sacrifice many things to take care of the foster child. Foster parents had biological girl children not able to attend private functions in order to ensure the safety of their children. The working parents were also faced the issue of attending functions as they were a getting a single holiday to take care of the child. So, they forced to skip events due to the problematic behaviour of children. Thus, constant skipping of social and personal functions affected their social networking.

6.3.2 Social stigma

“My relatives are saying it is because of him my husband got that accident.” (R3)

Participant 2 commented that,

Why didn't you take a little fairer child? (R2)

Stigma is prevalent among almost in every society. It affixed to a person or community who differs the general cultural norms. Social stigma is also predominant, and it is the rejection of a person or group based on their social characteristic. The Social stigma was indirectly affecting the foster parents. Society believed that foster children and other abandoned children were lacking glory. People were blaming foster children for the misfortunes of foster parents. The obsession for fair complexion existed among people. Foster parents faced the issue of not taking fair toned children. Society pointed that only fair complexioned children were born in a civilized family the other belongs to the uncivilized and had issues.

6.4 Supportive Mechanisms

6.4.1 Self-help groups

“I told you about the kudumbasree unit, right? They are really encouraging and financially also they helped me a lot.” (R3)

Self- help groups are helping the woman to stand in their own feet. It was also a part of social gathering where foster mother could share her issues, and it gives great relief for her. Foster parent received support from Self-help groups like kudumbasree. They helped foster parents financially by providing a small loan and also giving moral strength to foster parent. They also make felt the parent self-capable and proud for protecting a child.

6.4.2 Social Institutions

“One orphanage is here near to our home and the father of theirs helped us a lot.” (R4)

Abandoned children were accommodated in various social institutions. Social institution helped the foster parent in giving the right information about the foster care system. Other than adoption, foster parents were not aware of the foster care system and its procedures. Both the childless and those who had biological children approached social institutions for getting information related to fostering. Such social institutions also helped foster parents by connecting with the concerned person.

6.5 Requisite Skills

6.5.1 Using maladaptive strategies

“Nowadays he was not at all obedient and not listening me as well. I used to threaten him that, I will send him back. So, after that at least for some time he will study.” (R1)

... “And yesterday I threatened him by saying I will complain to police and he will take you. I am doing all these for his sake only.” (R2)

Foster parents had to take many responsibilities while fostering. They must be skillful to foreseen the issues going to face. As a part of managing child behavior and tantrums foster parents were using specific maladaptive strategies towards foster children. They realized that children were enjoying all the facilities provided to them. So, they listened foster parents when they felt foster parent is going to withdraw fostering.

6.5.2 Motivating Skills

.. “We always try to comfort him and we don't want to push him study more, but he is an allrounder in studies and sports as well. we will encourage all his talents because we are here to make him happy.” (P10)

Foster parents were aware that foster children had less interest in studies. They wished to provide quality education to foster children. Foster parents tried to inspire the children even though they ruined parent's dreams. They tried to build a bright future for foster children by motivating their extra skills and talents. That helped foster parent to develop a positive relationship with foster children.

6.6 Factors forces to continue fostering

6.6.1 Self-esteem issues in foster child

“I don't know whether he can accept it or not.” (R1)

“I am confused of how it is going to affect him.” (R3)

One of the main reasons for continuing fostering, was the deep concern of the perception of child. it makes child degrade about themselves. That was affecting the mental health of the child and had a negative thought about themselves; they had some issues within them. It can affect the child in future if they get any other chance.

6.6.2 Societal pressure

“Many people warned us the pitfall behind this, but we didn't listen to them. Then suddenly if we stop what they will thinks about us, and we feel shame to face those people.” (R8)

Foster parents were facing societal pressure to an extent. Foster parents were conscious about the perception of the society. Before providing fostering majority of the foster parents were asked not to provide fostering. The reasons were behavioural issues in foster children, lack of attachment, safety issues of foster family members etc. As a result of this, foster parent felt guilty to face people as they already warned the pitfalls of the system. Foster parents were negatively affected with the social perception of people, which forced parents to continue fostering.

VII Findings of the study

- Lack of attachment from foster child was a common concern among majority of the foster parents.
- The study found that psychological issues were negatively affecting the personal and professional life, foster parents.
- As per the demographic details, the foster parents having more years of experience are facing more issues.
- A common issue faced by foster parents having bio children were, safety issues of bio children and attachment issues between foster and bio children.
- Those foster parents who were working found it challenging to manage family and work pressure.
- Majority of the foster parents faced various hurdles with providing fostering like, humiliation among public, sacrificing personal happiness, changing habits, need to overcome demotivation and faced issues from immediate family members.
- Majority of the foster parent developed various skills like listening skills, patience, communication, using maladaptive strategies, managing skills, discipline skills, and motivation skills in order to handle the children which helped the parent in identifying own-potentials and manage the child to an extent.
- The different skills in foster parents helped them to cope up with the issues in fostering and showed resilience to make them positive.

- Half of the foster parents were concerned about the problematic behaviour of foster children, but still, with great patience, they tried to motivate and discipline the foster child.
- More than half of the foster parent was frustrated on the social perception of people, which had a negative impact on the social life of parents.
- It was notable that the obsession for white colour still existed among people. People were discouraging foster parents from taking black skin-toned children.
- The study found that constant labelling of children like all the foster children were problematic, had a negative impact on the perceptions of foster parents.
- The study found that half of the foster parent's social status got affected due to the behavioural issues in children like stealing, lying, aggression and lack of mannerisms.
- Unlike the common goal of fostering, the reunification of foster children with their biological parents were not the aim of the foster parent. Because the majority of the biological parents were unfit to protect the children.
- It was observed that since most of the children fall under the age group of 9-15, they often were governed by settled thoughts and mannerisms for that it becomes difficult to adopt a new setting.
- The proper interaction between authority and foster parent is inevitable in reducing the over expectation of foster parents.
- The study found that authority is hiding behavioural issues of children and pretend them to be normal.
- For effective parenting, a foster parent should be informed about the history of the child. But it was found that only a few parents were informed about the history of the child. It was understood that the authority hides the information regarding those children having a problematic history.
- The study found that foster parent was not provided sufficient pre-training sessions, from the concerned authority. That results in a lack of professionalism among foster parents and the majority of the parents were unaware of the issues that they were going to face.
- In extreme cases, it was noticed that foster children often possess a danger to parents.
- Foster parents were forced to use maladaptive measures in extreme case.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS

- It is better to provide a minimum one- week pre-training sessions for foster parents, the module must include skills development, parenting strategies, coping capacities, Children psychology, role clarification and rights of foster parents, different ways of rapport building with children. Foster parents should be equipped with proper training to never turn up blind eye to even minor issues involved in foster kid and also the parent must be understanding enough to be tactful while dealing with their requirement of a foster kid. Such that he/she must not feel that they were not being cared for.
- It is better to make sure foster parents are aware of the history of the foster parents so it would help foster parents to understand and manage foster children.
- Authority always makes ensure the social networking among foster parents either through social media or those who are unable to access social media, create a telephone directory for foster parents that should include all the foster parent's contact number. So, the new foster parents can take the suggestion from the experienced one.

- It is better to facilitate an opportunity for foster parents to build rapport with the child somewhere outside the system.
- More publicity needed to reduce the bias and negative social perception about foster care.
- It is better to provide parents with foster children who are younger to their biological children.

IX. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

- The limitation of the study was it only focussed the perspectives of foster parent.

X. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study has identified major issues in foster children and also the general perceptions of the prospective parents. This can help the social workers, counsellors and future foster parents to provide a successful fostering.

XI. CONCLUSION

Foster care is such a beautiful concept which provide a safe and stable future for those children who denied their family and parental care. It also helps those childless parents who are struggling with the legal complications of adoption. The necessity of foster care is increasing day by day because that much children are getting abandoned in the society. The happiness and wellbeing of each parent are notable. The fact that foster parents were facing ample number of issues throughout the fostering. Fostering would be useful only both the foster parent and child co-operate and adjust each other. The key focus of the study aimed at the psychosocial issues with parenting foster children. Result showed that the significant issues faced by foster parents were psychological, social issues, issues in children, parental concern among foster parents, hurdles faced by foster parents, initial predicaments in foster care etc. Even though parent faced all those issues, certain elements forced them to stop fostering, which includes self-esteem of child, legal constraints, self-regret, societal pressure, attachment issues. When the foster parent proceeds with these issues, the effectiveness of fostering was losing. The qualitative nature of the study allowed to bring a wide range of knowledge regarding the various issues faced by foster parents.

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