In Search for Secure Families

A study of what qualifies as a suitable family for vulnerable children at a child protection organization in South Africa

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Abstract

Problem. Approximately 400 000 children are in the year 2018 living in foster care in South Africa. Many of these children have wounds from neglect and abuse from their original family. Even though foster care is intended to be a safe haven many of the children instead end up drifting from one foster home to another, waiting to be placed in a permanent family. Because of the deficiencies in foster care it is of importance to investigate the social workers’ views of a suitable family, since we believe this will affect the assessment, which in the end will affect the child. This thesis explores what conceptions social workers at a child protection organization in South Africa have of a suitable family for vulnerable children.

Method. We interviewed seven social workers at mentioned organization, working with formal foster care and reunification with parents or relatives. We use theme analysis to process our findings which we thereafter analyze using Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

Result. Our findings reveal that the emotional needs of the child are considered most important by the social workers, followed by the physiological needs. Criminal behavior and poor values and morals are thought to make a family unsuitable.

Conclusion. We found that there are some differences in the social workers’ conception of a suitable family for vulnerable children, although they all underlined the same factors as most important. They also state that these children are thought to have the same needs as any other child; it all comes down to what they consider is the best interest of the child. Regardless which values the individual social worker has, what they look for in every family is that the child will feel safe and loved.
Sammanfattning

Problem. Cirka 400 000 barn lever i fostervård i Sydafrika år 2018. Många av dessa barn är påverkade av den försommelse och våld deras familj har utsatt dem för. Även att syftet med fostervård är att det ska vara en fristad är det många av barnen som flyttar från familj till familj och hela tiden väntar på att komma till en permanent familj. På grund av bristerna i fostervården är det viktigt att undersöka socialarbetarnas syn på en passande familj, eftersom vi anser att detta kommer påverka utredningen, vilket i slutändan kommer påverka barnet. Den här uppsatsen utforskar vad socialarbetare på en barnskyddsorganisation i Sydafrika uppfattar som en passande familj för utsatta barn.

Metod: Vi intervjuade sju socialarbetare på nämnd organisation, som arbetar med formell fostervård och återförenande med föräldrar eller släktingar. Vi använder tematisk analys för att bearbeta vårt undersökningsresultat vilket vi sedan analyserar med Maslows behovstrappa.

Resultat. Våra undersökningsresultat visar att socialarbetarna anser att de emotionella behoven hos barnet är de viktigaste, vilka sedan följs av de fysiologiska behoven. Kriminellt beteende och olämpliga värderingar och moral tros utgöra en opassande familj.

Slutsats. Resultatet visar att det är vissa skillnader i socialarbetarnas uppfattning av en passande familj för utsatta barn, samtidigt som de alla betonar samma faktorer som mest viktiga. De menar också att dessa barn anses ha samma behov som vilket annat barn som helst; allt handlar om vad de anser är det bästa för barnet. Oavsett vilka värderingar den individuella socialarbetaren har, vad de letar efter i varje familj är att barnet ska kunna känna sig säkert och älskat.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, a little over 400 000 children are living in foster care in South Africa (South African Social Security Agency, 2018). Many of the children in foster care have wounds not only from neglect and abuse from their original family but also from being removed from their home into a new home. Many of these children drift from foster home to foster home, waiting for a permanent family. Even though foster care is thought to be a safe haven, for many of these children that is not the case. Reunification with relatives is seen as the better option since the child already has a bond with them and will remain in the same culture. The level of stability experienced is often higher amongst children placed with relatives than non-relatives. At the same time, relatives are more often older, have a lower educational level and are in poor health. It is also harder to control the birth parents access to their children since they usually have relationships with the relatives, which put the children at risk of re-abuse (Bass, Shields & Behrman, 2004).

The efficiency of foster care is questioned; there is a high number of breakdowns of foster placements and an increase in behavioral problems compared to children in group homes (Vanderfaeillie, Pijnenburg, Damen and Van Holen, 2015). An inadequate screening of the foster parents is sometimes the reason for placement breakdowns. Another reason is the social workers’ decision to not subject relatives to the same rigorous screening as prospective non-related foster parents (Carter & van Breda, 2015).

Because of the eventual deficiencies in foster care, it is interesting to investigate the social workers’ conceptions of a suitable family, which is believed to influence the assessment of the family which in the end will affect the child. To make sure the child’s life turns out better than the life she had before it is important that the assessment is made properly regardless if the child is to be placed with relatives or non-relatives.
2. AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Our aim with this study is to explore what conceptions social workers at a child protection organization in South Africa have of a suitable family for vulnerable children.

To fulfill this aim we will answer the following research questions:

- What characteristics should a family have for the social workers to regard it as suitable to care for a vulnerable child?
- What should the family’s home environment contain for the social workers to consider it as suitable for a vulnerable child to be placed in?

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. Definition of terms

ALTERNATIVE CARE
Children’s act (2005) describe alternative care as a general term which include foster care, child and youth care centres and temporary safe care facilities.

CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CENTRE
As stated by DSD (2010) this refers to all residential facilities for the care and protection of children, regardless of reason for placement.

CHILD INSTITUTIONS
Child institutions is according to Berens and Nelson (2015) defined as large concentrated facilities for children in the ages 0 to 17 years that can house more than 12 children and sometimes up to hundreds. To substitute the role of family-like caregivers, professional workers supervise the children in these facilities.

CHILD PROTECTION ORGANIZATION
Is defined by the Children’s Act (2005) as an organization approved by the head of social development to provide services related to reunification of children in alternative care with their families, and integration and placement of children in alternative care.
FAMILY
As it is written in the norms, standards, and practice guidelines for the children’s act:

A family is a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, adoption or cohabitation, characterized by a common residence or not, interacting and communicating with one another in their respective family roles, maintaining a common culture and governed by family rules (South African Department of Social Development, 2010, chapter 4:2).

FOSTER CARE
Is an alternative placement of children other than with biological parents, and is intended to serve those children who cannot safely remain within their own families. The term foster care refers to all out-of-home placements, such as with non-relative foster families or with relatives. A child is in foster care if the child has been placed as a result of an order of a children’s court. The purposes of foster care are to protect and nurture children by providing a safe environment, to promote the goals of permanency; towards family reunification, or by connecting children to other safe families intended to last a lifetime, and lastly to respect the cultural, ethnical and community diversity (Bass, Shields & Behrman, 2004; DSD, 2010; Children’s Act, 2005).

KINSHIP CARE
Kinship care is when a child is being placed with relatives (Bass, Shields & Behrman, 2004; Böning and Ferreira, 2013).

REUNIFICATION
In the context of child welfare Carnochan, Lee and Austin (2013) describe family reunification as services provided for intentions of returning children who have been placed in out-of-home care to their families of origin, which unlike kinship care, can involve returning to the parents.

FORMAL FOSTER CARE
Formal foster care, is when a child is being placed with non-family members (Böning & Ferreira, 2013).

In this thesis, we refer to all three kinds of placements as “foster care”.
FOSTER CHILD
A foster child is a child who has been placed in the care of a person who is not the parent or guardian of the child as a result of an order of the Children’s court or a transfer from a Child and Youth Care Centre or temporary safe care (DSD, 2010).

FOSTER CHILD GRANT
Foster child grant refers to the social security grant available to foster parents who has a child officially placed in their care (DSD, 2010).

FOSTER PARENT
This refers to a person, related or unrelated, who is responsible for a child placed in their care by an order of the Children’s Court (DSD, 2010). According to the children’s act, a prospective foster parent must fulfill the following criteria: be a fit and proper person, be willing and able to undertake and maintain the responsibilities of a child, be able to provide the necessary environment for the child. A foster parent also has to be properly assessed by a social worker (Children’s act, 2005).

SOCIAL WORK
International Federation of Social Workers, IFSW, define social work as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion among empowerment and liberation of people. Social change is described to change those structural conditions which contribute to oppression, marginalization and social exclusion and maintain social stability. Social change occurs where there is a need of change and development and can thereby be implemented on different levels of the society. Social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central principles to social work. Social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing which are underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges (IFSW, 2014).

3.2. Institutionalization

An estimated 8 million children worldwide are presently growing up in institutionalized care facilities. There has always been a discussion of how to care for those children who do not have access to a safe family environment. Over 80 years ago it was documented by researchers in child psychiatry that there are developmental delays among children separated from family environments
and placed in institutions (Berens & Nelson, 2015). According to the authors, research from the 21st century show several negative consequences for children worldwide being placed in institutional care such as defects in areas regarding physical growth, cognitive function, neurodevelopment, and social-psychological health. For instance, the institutionalized children show growth suppression along with decreased weight, height and head circumference. It is also thought that HIV infection is more prevalent among institutionalized children than among community-based children. Unfavorable attachment patterns in the area of social-emotional development are believed to be associated with later behavioral difficulties. The disorganized attachment is the style most likely of later difficulties and the secure attachment the most protective style. It has been reported that children that have been institutionalized in early childhood are found to have increases in disorganized attachment and decreases in secure attachment. Those children that are removed from their families in liaison with early developmental sensitive periods together with those children who have least access to individualized caregiving are seen to have the most distinct effects (Berens & Nelson, 2015).

Since these findings were discovered, global conventions such as 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasized children’s right to care within a family-like environment that offers individualized support. According to the scientific evidence concerning the institutionalized children, the authors stress the urgency to achieve deinstitutionalization in the global child protection sector (Berens & Nelson, 2015).

3.3. Foster placements

According to Böning and Ferreira (2013) the most common reasons for children being placed in foster care in South Africa is the death of their parents due to HIV/AIDS or tuberculosis, and parents which have gone missing. Family factors and certain environmental factors, such as poverty, unemployment and alcohol and drug abuse, are discovered as other reasons to why children are placed in foster care. While other environmental factors such as criminal activities and inappropriate housing, along with the individual factors such as challenging behavior, are reported to not have a big impact on whether the child will be placed.

The study identifies two types of foster placements: kinship care and formal foster care (Böning & Ferreira, 2013). Their study show that kinship care is the most common kind of placement in South Africa (76,5%). The most common kind of placement is with the child’s grandparents; second most common is the nuclear family, and third most common is placements in multigenerational families.
Homosexual couples who serve as foster parents and child-headed households with foster children are reported to be very rare, with child-headed households being slightly more common. Since the biological parents often are deceased or missing, the authors report that the possibility of reunification with the parents only exist in 2% of the cases involved in their research. Because of the biological parents’ long-term problems, reunification with the parents is still problematic in those cases.

3.4. Legislative documents

The child’s right to be raised in a family is emphasized in both national and international legislative documents.

CHILDREN’S ACT

The Children’s Act of South Africa expresses the need for the child to remain in the care of her parent, family and extended family, and the importance of maintaining a connection with her family and extended family, as well as with her culture and traditions. The Children’s act state that the best interest of the child standard should be applied in matters concerning the care, protection and wellbeing of a child. A child has the right to participate and share her views in matters concerning her, with consideration taken to her age, maturity and state of development.

Before a children’s court place a child in foster care, the court receives a report from a designated social worker concerning; “the cultural, religious and linguistic background of the child; and the availability of a suitable person with a similar background to that of the child who is willing and able to provide foster care to the child.” (Children’s act, 2005, s. 144). It is possible for a child to be placed in the foster care of a person from a different background; if there is an existing bond between that person and the child, or if a suitable person with a similar background is not available to provide foster care to the child. If the court thinks reunification with the child’s biological parents will be possible at some point and that it is in the best interest of the child, the placement order has to be designed in such a way that reunification with the biological parents can be facilitated by a social worker when considered possible (Children’s act, 2005).
SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTITUTION

In section 28(1) in the South African Constitution (1996) it is stated that every child has the right to parental or family care. It also states that the child has the right to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family.

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

In the 5th article of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents, legal guardians or other person legally responsible for a child to provide appropriate direction and guidance towards the child are stated. Article 20(1), (2), (3) of the mentioned Convention describe that states parties shall in accordance to the national laws ensure alternative care for a child that has been temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment. Further it says that it should be considered when finding such care for the child, such as foster placement, that regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.

AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD

The 2nd paragraph of the 18th article of the African Charter on the Rights and welfare of the Child (African Union, 1999) provision should be made for the protection of the child in case of dissolution of the parents’ marriage. It is further stated in article 25 that a child who is deprived of his family environment should be entitled to protection and assistance. He should in the need of it be provided with alternative family care, which could include foster placement. Consideration to the child’s ethnic, religious and linguistic background should be taken. The state parties should try all means to reunify the child with his parents or relatives in those cases it is appropriate.

3.5. About the organization explored in this thesis

All information concerning the organization has been acquired through communication with employees or from the organization’s website. To protect the organization’s confidentiality, we do not refer to their website nor include the names of the employees.

The organization is a faith-based organization founded in 1992 which is focused on placing children in secure families. The organization is registered as a Child Protection Organization by the Department of Social Development. It is also registered as a Child and Youth Care Centre and can accommodate 60 children at a time. There are approximately 10 social workers working at the
organization alongside with a therapist, teachers, child care workers and maintenance-and
administrative staff. The organization’s main goal is to place the children back with their own
families, with relatives or in an unrelated foster family. What always is crucial is that the child ends
up in the family that best suits its long term needs. The organization acts as an alternative to long
term institutional care and their philosophy is that institutional care should only be seen as a
temporary solution and as a last option when there are no other options left. According to the
organization’s website, institutionalized children are believed to often have fewer opportunities for
emotional, physical and social development. This, alongside with the belief that children develop
better within a family structure, is the reason the organization is focused on getting children
integrated back into a family. The organization’s vision is: “Children in secure families”.

The organization has formed a parenting skills program which has been rolled out to twenty “non-
governmental organizations” in their province. The organization plays a leading role in the act of
deinstitutionalization of children and has collaborations with other African countries, such as
Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Burundi and Kenya. The organization has also been
acknowledged for their screening and assessment of potential foster families being the first of its
kind contextualized for African conditions and cultures.

3.5.1. Process for placement

When a child is referred for foster care, the social workers at the organization screen prospective
foster families using interviews and home visits, scheduled and unscheduled. Interviews are carried
out with everyone in the household, to reassure that everyone is open for a new child coming in to
the family. Everyone in the household above the age of 18 also needs to fill in different forms such
as the name clearance and to be screened against the child protection register and the sexual
offenses register. The social workers also take character references. The prospective foster parents
then have to participate in the organization’s compulsory 5-day parenting training, where they
discuss things as parenting skills, communication and self-awareness. Foster parents who have a
child officially placed in their care have the right to apply for a foster care grant, which is
approximately 920 rand. In the assessment, the social workers make it clear that this cannot be
their motivation for fostering a child. As stated by Böning and Ferreira (2013), foster care can, for
some, be seen as a poverty relief and might be the family’s only fixed income. The risk is that child
then does not receive the full benefit of the grant, which is why it is important to assess the family’s
financials. Once a foster family has been assessed and approved, their act is stored in a database
until a child who the social workers think could make a good match becomes available. In the
matching, the most important thing to consider is whether the child’s needs will be met in this family. When a child and a family have been matched, a case manager from the community will take the case to court and finalize it. Then the family has a court order and the child is officially placed in their care.

4. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

4.1. Models of the ideal foster family

Carter and van Breda (2016) propose a model of the ideal foster parent. The model is based on findings from interviews with social workers and foster parents in South Africa. The model is made up of four key themes regarding what foster homes should be able to provide. First is unconditional love. The foster parents should be affectionate, love the child unconditionally and make them feel worthy. The parent should be firm, fair and friendly, and for example give the child hugs. The second theme found is safety and security. The foster parents should make sure the child is free from danger and fear and ensure that they actually feel safe. This is exemplified by having a safe neighborhood, a home free from alcohol or drug abuse and abuse or neglect. The third theme is stability. Ensuring the child that she is not going to move anymore and provide a feeling of being stable and emotionally well balanced. This includes having a somewhat stable marriage relationship, having resilience for difficult behavior and being able to care for the child’s basic needs, which includes having a reasonable degree of financial stability. The fourth theme is nurturing. It highlights the importance of the foster parents encouraging the growth and development of the child by for example encouraging education. The foster parents should value the child’s cultural and racial identity, as well as ensure the child that they will stay in the child’s life even after she is 18 years old (Carter & van Breda, 2016).

In Scholte’s (1997) study, similar themes are found. This quantitative study analyzes the psychosocial characteristics of children in foster care and residential care. Two-hundred seventy-five (275) children from intake lists of two child welfare organizations in two cities in The Netherlands year 1997 is in the study compared with 288 juveniles admitted to residential care in The Netherlands year 1988. The findings reveal that it is important that the social worker investigate the emotional, behavioral and personal stability of the foster parents and siblings in the family before placing the child. Foster parents’ capacity to interact, communicate, resolve conflicts, and to supply the basic emotional support that the children need to develop in a healthy way.
accordingly with their age is also found to be important. When disciplining the child this should be made so that the child will be able to understand what she did wrong.

Another study regarding a successful foster placement is focusing on what the important factors are in whether a placement work or not (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). The study was carried out through a questionnaire sent to approximately 500 foster children, their foster parents and their social workers in England. Their findings reveal that a successful foster placement depend on three things: the child’s characteristics, the qualities of the foster parent, and the interaction between the child and the foster parent.

First is the children’s characteristics. Children who wanted to be fostered, and most importantly, wanted to be in that specific family, did better than those who did not. The children, foster parents, and social workers all agree on the importance of the child’s need for a say whether they are fostered, adopted or living with a family member, and what the nature of their contact with their families will be. For those who do not want to be placed, aggressive behavior is believed to increase their chances of going home to their biological families. For example, some children prefer to be in children’s homes than foster homes to avoid commitments. Respondents also highlight the child’s personal qualities. Children who are attractive, have a loving nature and bring happiness to the family is described as good foster children. Problematic behavior, such as stealing, staying out late at night, having a drug abuse or being depressed, is described as reasons to why a placement do not work (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003).

The second factor they present for a successful placement is the qualities of the foster parent. Warm, child-orientated foster parents are found to be more successful in making a placement last. The participants all highlight foster parents who are loving, encouraging and treat them as part of the family. Respect and the ability to see the child as an individual as well as assuring them they are in a safe place is also seen as important aspects. The third important factor for a placement to be successful is believed to be the interaction between the foster parent and the child. Social workers explain the importance of the child matching the characteristics of the family. The children agree by explaining how they want to come to a “normal environment”; one which they recognize and can feel comfortable in. The chemistry between child and foster parent is also emphasized. This is simply described as “a clicking”, where the personalities and commitments determine whether the placement will work or not (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003).
In a study from Sweden, Bergman (2016) analyzed foster parents’ suitability in relation to perceptions of foster children’s needs during the twentieth century in Sweden. Bergman (2016) used a discourse analysis of documents selected from the child welfare in a Swedish town. The findings of the study reveal that the most essential themes for a suitable foster family during the 1930’s were basic material needs such as a separate bed for the child, good and adequate food, clothing, warmth, protection and hygiene. All children were seen to have the same needs. The ideal foster family was based on structure of a nuclear family where the father and the mother in the family were expected to have specific gender roles, which were supposed to be taught to the child. The child was expected to be raised in a way she would become a good society member and to be able to provide for herself. The idea of an unsuitable foster family was based on conditions such as poor and unhygienic homes and/or too many children. It was first in the 1950’s, when the child psychiatric clinics were established, that the child’s mental needs were considered in the investigations of foster families.

In the later part of the 20th century it was found that it was more important to investigate whether the child’s psychological and social needs were fulfilled, due to new research about children’s needs. Therefore, it was considered important that the children had the possibility to develop as individuals. Additionally, it was important that the child had her own room and that the foster family had a cozy home. Foster parent’s history were also found to be important issues in the assessment. Those families who were considered unsuitable foster families in this time were those who were too old or too young, had a lot of conflicts in the family and/or if the foster parents got divorced (Bergman, 2016).

4.2. A secure family

A study was carried out through a questionnaire sent to social workers in South Africa (Böning & Ferreira, 2013). The study emphasized the importance of the foster children being given the opportunity to develop and build up their self-confidence in their foster family. The child’s physical health should be looked after and the child should feel comfortable and free in his/hers ethnic, cultural and spiritual identity. The foster parents should be given the opportunity to develop problem-solving skills, emotional intelligence and humor to be able to help the child dissociate from her psychological pain.

A study which aims to compare foster parents in USA and Norway discuss the ideal foster parent (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012). The interviewed foster parents describe the need for foster parents to
set clear limits on children's behavior, to articulate consequences for misbehavior, and to protect them from harm. Mitchell, Kuczynski, Tubbs and Ross (2010) conduct a Canadian study which also discuss the need for rules, responsibilities, and structure in foster homes. Twenty children are interviewed about their experiences during transition into foster care. The participants suggest that the foster parents familiarize the child with the home and the persons in the home and make sure the child is being integrated in the family (Mitchell et al., 2010; Berrick & Skivenes, 2012).

Physical activity, comfort food, emotional support and sharing is considered important components for a foster parent to make a child feel comfortable, according to the interviewed children. Some children also emphasize the importance of giving foster children choices such as which school to attend (Mitchell et al., 2010). When Carter and van Breda (2016) ask the participating foster parents what makes a suitable foster family, they answer that having a clean house is the most important aspect. Other than that, they focus on the psychological care; being able to care for the child emotionally and to handle her feelings. Honesty, communication and teaching the child values is also found to be important aspects. Social workers agree on the importance of caring for the child on an emotional level, but also emphasize the importance of legislative requirements, such as not appearing on any criminal records (Carter & van Breda, 2016).

In the presented research we found different models of the ideal foster family. What the different models have in common is that love, stability and safety is regarded as important. Drinking alcohol and having a criminal record is highlighted as something that makes a foster family unsuitable. Our study can contribute with additional perspectives from social workers on what a suitable family is for vulnerable children. We discovered a lack of previous research regarding reunification and what is considered as important in those families. This is something that our study can further contribute with.
5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs was chosen as the theoretical framework for this thesis since it describes the needs of the human being and their importance in our ability to live a healthy and well-functioning life. The theory can in ways describe what the social workers look for when assessing a prosper foster family and can further bring a broader understanding in discussions of suitability.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943)

Maslow formulated the theory of hierarchy of needs in 1943 as he saw a need for a positive theory of motivation. The theory should conform to the known facts; clinical, observational and experimental. Though, as described by Maslow, the theory is mostly derived from clinical experience. Through his theory, Maslow describe how our needs are organized into a hierarchy of importance; how once our most basic need is met, higher needs will emerge. When these needs in turn are met, even higher needs will emerge, and so on.

Maslow describe our physiological needs as the first which needs to be fulfilled. He exemplifies this by describing a person who is lacking everything in life; food, safety, love and esteem. Maslow believe that his hunger for food would be stronger than for anything else, therefore the major motivation would be the physiological needs. He continues to describe how all other needs will become nonexistent until the physiological needs are met; “The urge to write poetry, the desire to acquire an automobile, the interest in American history, the desire for a new pair of shoes are, in the extreme case, forgotten or become of secondary importance” (Maslow, 1943, s. 373). Although, Maslow argues for our physiological needs being channels for all our other needs as well. For example, a person’s believed hunger might actually be a desire for comfort or dependence.

The next needs to be fulfilled according to Maslow is our safety needs. Maslow discuss the need for physical safety, and exemplifies a child’s loss of safety by losing the support of the mother, threats of punishment, physical assault, separation within the family, as well as having different diseases. He describes how this can cause the child to feel unsafe. Maslow describes some consequences of feeling unsafe to be: fear, nightmares and a need for protection and reassurance. In order for a child to feel safe, Maslow stress the need for an undisrupted routine; to have a predictable world, since inconsistency and unfairness in the parents is thought to threaten to make the child’s world seem unsafe and unreliable. Maslow describes how rejected children sometimes cling to the abusive
parents solely for the safety and protection she believes they can provide. Maslow continue to explain how children who have been brought up in loving families do not face the same challenges and reactions as children who have grown up in unsafe families. When you are safe you no longer feel endangered, and your safety needs are therefore met.

The love needs are the following needs that Maslow describes when the physiological and the safety needs are fulfilled. According to Maslow this is where the person starts to desire love, affection and belongingness. In this stage the person will desire affectionate relations with people and the inclusion of a group. The feeling of maladjustment is seen to be a consequence of inadequacies of these needs. Maslow stress that the love needs include not only receiving love but also giving.

Further on, Maslow states that all people have a desire for a stable, firmly based, high appraisal of themselves to feel self-esteem and for the esteem of others, which are found in The esteem needs, which are the needs that comes next in order after the love needs. Firmly based self-esteem is described by Maslow as something that is based on real capacity among achievement and respect from others. Further he describes that these needs may be categorized in two subcategories. First is the desire for strengths, achievement, adequacy, confidence, independence and freedom. Second is the desire for reputation or prestige as in respect from other people, recognition, attention and appreciation. Maslow stress the importance of the esteem needs to be fulfilled while he means this leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world. On the contrary, if these needs are not being fulfilled, feelings of inferiority, weakness and helplessness appears.

The last need to be fulfilled according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is the need for self-actualization. Maslow describes this as finding yourself and your purpose in life in order to avoid feelings of restlessness even when all other needs are met. To be as happy as possible, a musician has to make music and a poet has to write; we have to become everything that we are capable of becoming in order to feel pure joy, according to Maslow. For these needs to occur it is required that all our above mentioned needs are already satisfied (Maslow, 1943).
6. METHODOLOGY

For this study we used the qualitative method semi-structured interviews. Our aim is to find out what the individual social worker finds most important in her assessment of foster families. Using interviews as our method gave us the opportunity to ask the questions we need to get that broader understanding. We chose semi-structured interviews so that the interviews could be flexible, and that the focus could be on what the interviewee found most important. The questions were carried out in a way so the interviewee had freedom in answering (Bryman, 2011). Our aim is to get a one-sided conversation, where the questions allow space for informative and detailed answers. According to Padgett (2017) individual interviews are scheduled in advance, takes place in a private setting and are preceded by careful preparation. For the result and discussion section we chose to only use the pronoun “she” regarding the participants of the study. We did this to protect the participant’s anonymity; by only using “she” it will not be possible to detect whether the participant is female or male.

6.1. Sampling

When choosing the subject for our thesis, we emailed the founder of the organization and asked for her permission for us to write our thesis about their organization. After she gave us permission she directed us to their international volunteer coordinator, who then referred us to the person in the social work office who came to be our gatekeeper. According to Padgett (2017) a gatekeeper is a person whose support is needed to get access to the field. In consultation with our gatekeeper, we chose who would be suitable to request to participate in our study. Since there are not many social workers at the organization we decided to ask all of them to participate. We used a consecutive selection since we interviewed those available; those working as social workers at the organization. Our sample consists of social workers working at the organization and who are conducting investigations for choosing suitable families for the children in the areas of reunification with the original family and formal foster care. Our sample consists of seven social workers, more specifically; social auxiliary workers (social work assistants), social workers, senior social workers, and directors. For the sake of the participants’ right to confidentiality, we chose to refer to all of them as “SW”, short for social worker, regardless of their standing in the hierarchy. In the result and the discussion, we do not make any distinction between the social workers and we do not pay any attention to the impact their roles may have on the answers given in this study.
6.2. Gathering of data

We carried out our interviews at the premises of the organization where the interviewees work. We did individual interviews to get a wide variety in answers and also for the interviewees to not affect each other’s answers. The interviews each took half an hour to one and a half hour. Six of the interviews were carried out in English and one in Swedish since one of the participants is Swedish. From the Swedish interview, we translated the sections included in our initial coding ourselves. We carried out the interviews together since English is not our mother language and it therefore reduced the risk of misunderstandings. The interviews were recorded and thereafter transcribed. After the first interview we decided to change our interview guide because we noticed that the questions were too many and to broad for the aim that we had. We also chose to have different interview guides depending on which social worker we interviewed, since some of the interviewed work with kinship care and some with formal foster care. Even though we had various interview guides, we designed the guides so that the questions would be the same with only small differences. For example, in one of the guides we refer to foster families while we in the other refer to the original family (appendices 1, 2, 3). When all the interviews had been carried out we transcribed all the interviews separately and both of us had approximately the same amount of interviews to transcribe. To ensure no misunderstandings had been made both of us listened to all recorded interviews at least once.

6.3. Method of analysis

To reach our aim we analyzed our interviews using the method thematic analysis. This kind of analysis revolves around finding recurring topics to divide them into themes and subthemes. The benefit of using themes is that it gives us a possibility to describe, explain and compare (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Since the interviewees work at the same organization and use the same policy documents, our preconceptions tell us that similar themes might appear in the different interviews which is why this might be a good analysis method to use.

Our analysis began with proofreading the material to find our initial codes. We first did this individually and then together. In the initial coding, we focused on marking what we thought could be of importance to our thesis. To identify our themes, we used the technique repetitions, meaning we searched for those topics which occurred multiple time (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The next step was to organize them into main themes and sub themes. In consultation with our supervisor, 4 main themes appeared.
6.4. Trustworthiness

According to Bryman (2011), a lot of qualitative researchers have been discussing whether or not to use the definitions of reliability and validity in qualitative research; since those definitions often refer to the measurements in quantitative studies. Bryman (2011) presents alternative criteria to evaluate a qualitative research which are more adapted to those kind of studies, summarized in the conception of trustworthiness which in turn consist of four sub criteria: Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

_Credibility_ is the degree of conformity between the respondents’ views and the researcher’s interpretations of them (Padgett, 2017). To be able to establish credibility the researcher reports the results to the participants of the study, so that they can confirm if the researcher has been perceiving the reality as it has been described by the participants (Bryman, 2011). The participants in our research have not been given the opportunity to read our thesis before it was handed in, which we have to acknowledge can influence the credibility. However, we tried our best during the interviews to ensure that we have understood what the participants wanted to say by repeating what they have been saying and by asking supplementary questions so that they could explain more in detail what they meant.

_Transferability_ refers to generalizability, not as in quantitative studies of the sample but of the study’s findings (Padgett, 2017). The focus in most qualitative studies is to study a small group of people with similar characteristics; the focus is therefore on the uniqueness of the context as well as the meaning of that particular aspect of the social reality that is being studied. The more the researcher describes about the culture or environment which is being studied, the more the results may be transferable to another environment (Bryman, 2011). Since we want to ensure the organization and the interviewees’ confidentiality we have no detailed descriptions of the participants or the organization which limits the transferability.

_Dependability_ indicates that the procedures of the study are documented and traceable and even though they do not have to lead to the same conclusions they should have a logic that makes sense to others (Padgett, 2017). This means to describe all phases of the research process: problem definition, sample, field notes, transcriptions, chosen analysis etc. (Bryman, 2011). All phases are in our study described to the extent so the confidentiality is still high.
Confirmability is when the study’s findings are not imagined or made up but rather firmly linked to the data (Padgett, 2017). Based on the fact that the researcher cannot get complete objectivity in the social scientific research, the confirmability refers to that the researchers ensure that they have not consciously let their own personal values or theoretical orientation influence the execution of and the conclusions from a study (Bryman, 2011). Our interview guide consisted of open questions so that the participants could answer freely and according to what they thought was most important. We acknowledge the cultural differences, for example concerning the views on sexual orientation and family constellation, between the researchers and the participants and made sure to not present one cultural understanding as superior to the other.

6.5. Ethical considerations

For this study we made sure to follow the different ethical principles described by Bryman (2011). We have, from an ethical aspect, chose to not include the children at the organization nor the prosper foster families in the study.

Informed consent
According to Bryman (2011) the researcher should inform the participants about the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. We informed all concerned that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw their consent at any time but our desire is that they withdraw within a week after the interview, since any longer would affect the production of the study. At the same time, we are aware of the ethical principle of the participant’s right to always be able to withdraw her consent (Bryman, 2011). They were also informed that they can refuse to answer a question, or to cancel the interview if they want to. We ensured that all participants know about our aim with the study. To ensure that the participants were aware of the terms of their participation we gave them a consent form in time for them to read before the interview. Before the interviews we retrieved a written consent from the participant stating she is aware of the terms of her participation and agree to it. The interviews were carried out by the both of us which we informed them of. Something that we have to acknowledge is the power ratio of us being two and the interviewee only one since this might put the participant in an uncomfortable situation where she does not feel safe to speak her mind. To reduce this risk, we reminded them about the voluntariness.
Confidentiality
Bryman (2011) describe that the data of the study should be handled with greatest confidentiality so that the participants cannot be recognized. The interviews were carried out in a private setting where only the participant and the researchers were present to ensure that the participant could speak freely without others hearing. No personal information, such as name and role at the organization, has been included in the thesis to ensure that the interviewee cannot be recognizable. We chose to refer to all participants simply as “social workers” without regard to their standing in the hierarchy, to reassure their anonymity. To further respect the confidentiality we chose to not include the name of the organization, instead we refer to it as “the organization”. The data collected will only be used for this research purpose. To ensure the data being handled confidentially the researchers are the only ones’ listening to the interviews and when transcribed the recordings were deleted. The researchers and their supervisor are the only ones to read the transcriptions and the unfinished material of the thesis.

7. RESULTS

The four main themes which emerged in the creating of this thesis is as following: “physical safety”, “emotional aspects”, “behavioral aspects”, and “the constitution of family”.

7.1. Physical safety

In the theme “physical safety”, three sub themes emerged: “Housing and neighborhood”, “Education and health” and “criminality”. These concern the environmental aspects of the child’s ability of being and feeling safe.

7.1.1. Housing and neighborhood

Several different environmental needs of the child and the parents’ ability to meet those emerged during the interviews, as explained by one of the interviewees:

The basic needs would be the first, that would be the shelter. The child has to have that accommodation. And what is inside that accommodation? The child has to have a bed to sleep on. There must be food in that house, and then there must be water in that house (SW 7).
Many of the participants’ state that it is not about the size or the looks of the house but rather the suitability; it has to be safe for a child to grow up in. One participant state that the houses does not have tap water inside, but then it will need to be close by, for example if there is a community tap where they can fetch water. One participant expresses a risk with parents not providing for their children; if the child does not have food, someone else can offer her food in exchange for “anything you can think of” (SW 4). One example of an unsuitable home which is mentioned is one where there is alcohol, especially those which are being turned into taverns during the evenings since these are not considered to be safe for a child due to the things the child can be exposed to.

Due to the high rates of drugs and violence in townships, one participant explain how she would not assess a person living in one, while another participant state that living in a township might only be a housing issue, and the child might still be safe when living there. Another aspect of a safe environment mentioned by two of the interviewees concerns the distance to the original family in cases of abuse. If the child is placed in the same area as the abusive parent lives in, the parent can find out and still have access to the child, which according to two interviewees would then not be considered a suitable family. One of them state the complexity in placing the child with its relatives since relatives usually live close to each other, hence close to the abusive parent.

One participant state that if you have a two-room-house or a big house is not as important as being a loving person. Another participant has the same opinion:

So it’s not like, just to give the child a home but it is to give him that warmly environment, because family… doesn’t mean then, if you’ve got a house then that constitutes family, but then the care, the level of care that is inside the family. [...] the warmth, the love, acceptance and all those things. (SW 4)

7.1.2. Education and health

One basic need discussed is the need for school and education. One of the participants describe education as a human right, while another meant that the lack of it would be a safety risk for the child: “There must be an education, the child has to go the school, so that the child can have a bread tomorrow, and be able to stand on their own in the future.” (SW 7)
This need involves the possibility to attend school and preschool, to have walking distance to school or someone who can drive there, as well as to have someone who can help the child with her homework. As stated by one of the participants, it does not have to be the parent herself providing this help. If a mother cannot read or write, she can still ensure the child has someone who can help her with her homework, such as a neighbor or someone else in the household.

The child’s health needs are also mentioned as one of the basic needs, and the parents’ responsibility in being able to care for them. If the child has got a chronic illness or has to be at the hospital every other week, the parents have to be able to attend to all those medical matters. A secure family is described by the participants as a family which meet the needs of the child, as SW 1 say: “the main thing that we are looking for is for the family that can be able to take good care of the child. That can be able to meet the needs of the child. That can protect the child, that can make sure that the child is secured. That’s the family that we are looking for.”

7.1.3. Criminality

The sub theme criminality emerged as a result of the wide discussion concerning how criminality make you unsuitable to care for a child. Law-abiding people are by one participant considered as suitable since they by that teach their children good values:

You are driving with your children and you over speed, that’s, some people they don’t see that as a problem because I am rushing or whatever, what if something’s happens. Even though something’s not happening, but then what are you teaching the children? That you can actually break the law. […] Because there’s a lot, the crime rate is very high, alcohol and drug abuse is very high, those are the things that are killing the society. So, that I would say, then it makes a good foster parent because they would be looking after themselves and then they could be able to look after the children (SW 4).

The participants state that emotional and physical abuse as well as taking drugs make a family unsuitable. Having a criminal record is also considered reason to close the assessment of a family. Two participants give examples of what seemed to be suitable prosper foster mothers, but in both cases they later found out that their adult sons living with them had criminal records containing violations and rape, which resulted in them closing their application. Because, as one of the participants explain, if that son was ever going to be alone with the child it would be too big of a risk. Selling of drugs is also mentioned as a reason to close an application, because of the risk of
them still being involved in it even if they say they have quit. One participant explain how they take into account what kind of crime the person has been convicted for:

This is something that happened when I was 18 years old and it was still apartheid and I walked on the wrong side of the street”. Yes, those kind of things doesn’t matter, it’s only those kind of things like, that is not good for a child. But if you say that there is someone who has been drunk driving 10 times the last 5 years, then there is a problem in the family here (SW 3).

7.2. Emotional aspects

In the theme “emotional aspects”, three sub themes emerged: “Emotionally ready”, “children’s needs” and “love and care”. These concern the emotional needs of the child and the ability of the parents to make her feel loved.

7.2.1. Emotionally ready

One of the themes that emerged in four of the interviews was the importance of being emotionally ready to receive a child. To still deal with trauma, such as the loss of a child, is thought to influence the parents’ capacity to take care of and understand a child. SW 2 explain how they assess parents who still grieve:

A couple that was interviewed uhm they were well, first time parents. Uhm, “why do you want to have foster care uhm parents?” “no we’ve lost our boy”. […] then what we do is we stop the assessment, we put it on a hold, and then we refer them for counseling. Because maybe there’s loss there. Griefment. […] it’s not like we close their application for foster care, it’s just that they have to deal with this issue.

A suitable parent is described by the participants as a person who has dealt with her traumas or emotional barriers that she has had in her life. Since the children also have been through a lot, the participants highlight the need for someone who is emotionally ready, someone that can understand and support them. It is further emphasized by the participants that the reason for wanting to become a foster parent should be coming from the heart and not as a reason of replacement because you lost your own child or grandchild. Nor is motive based on the added income from the foster care grant seen as good motive. One participant mention examples of good
motives: “the person that is having that eager, that willingness, that love ehh to, to look at the best interest of the child, because the best interest of the child is huge” (SW 1).

7.2.2. Children’s needs

In the organization’s training for social workers involved in foster care, they discuss the needs for foster children and compare it to the needs of their own children. The needs of their own child are found to be described to a much greater extent and includes more details. Things such as my child does not like corn flakes and my child likes to sleep early, appear. The interviewee reflects over the difference between a foster child and your own child: “So what is the difference? Isn’t that the same needs, that we have then for these children also? You forget to say this boy is actually musical. Why didn’t we place him with a family that is musical?” (SW 2).

The child needs to be seen, heard and acknowledged. It is also highlighted that the parents let the child talk if she needs to talk and for them to actively listen and act. Further on the topic of communication is the need for the child to be involved in decisions concerning her in order to understand. For smaller children, their language is through play, which is why the participants state the importance of the parents being able to play with their child.

The interviewees state the importance of the family giving love, stability and support to the child so that she can build up her self-esteem and feel safe. When the child can feel safe in the family, the family is valued as a suitable family. One participant describes:

Someone who’s just got a soft spot for children. Someone who can love, who can show love for children and provide for the children. You know, someone who can be able to meet the day-to-day needs of the children. So for me, I believe that’s suitability and that’s love. Someone who, who….. how do I put it, someone who’s concerned about their children. (SW 5)

Two of the participants describe how they before placing a child in a family ask themselves if they would feel comfortable to leave their own children with this family; because there is no difference between their own child and the child that is placed in care. As SW 2 express: “if I can’t leave my own children with them, then they not good enough for any other child”.

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7.2.3. Love and care

One theme which arose in all of the interviews was “love and care”. Unconditional love and commitment is highlighted amongst several of the participants; that the parents will treat the child like their own, and to love her even when she is not behaving well. One participant state that if the family is loving, you can conquer anything, and gave the following description of a suitable family:

Families are very different. Very different, they’ve got their own way of doing things, so I wouldn’t say it’s someone who does not drink alcohol, someone who does not…someone who believes in God and stuff, no. It’s... Families make it work in their own way. But I think with love and understanding of children, and understanding of one another, I think that’s a suitable family for me. (SW 5)

Concerning reunification, one participant highlight the importance of building on the relationship with the parents or relatives before the child moves back to ensure the child feels safe. Foster parenting on the other hand, is described as extra parenting, which is why the participants describe the need to go the extra mile. When asked about her definition of good care, SW 1 answer:

Good care is when the person can be able to be available at any time for the child, when she needs someone. Whether to talk to, ehh, to express whatever feelings, to report to when there’s a problem. Ehh the person that is going to take care of the basic needs of the child.

One participant explains that as a foster parent you have to separate the behavior from the person, deal with the difficult behavior, and still love the person. If a parent gives the child conditions, such as “if you go to school I will buy you this”, or “if you do good I will do this”, the child will grow up thinking she has to perform, and that she is only good enough. This is according to the participant an example of conditional love, which is stated as an undesirable quality. Concerning the trauma which comes with being removed from your home, one participant stress the importance of assessing whether the family will be able to give stability and make the child feel loved.
7.3. Behavioral aspects

In the theme “behavioral aspects” three sub themes emerged: “discipline”, “good principles” and “financial skills”. These concern the parent’s ability to meet and raise the child.

7.3.1. Discipline

When discussing parenting skills, the participants highlight the importance of discipline, and the balance between discipline and punishment. One participant explains that someone who is very soft and who just talk things through with her child does not discipline in an effective way. Some foster parents on the contrary, threaten to take the child back to where she came from if she is misbehaving, which was mentioned as another example of bad discipline. Several participants mention abuse when they discuss discipline and punishment. When asked how she related to a parent beating her children in educational purposes, one participant (SW 3) answer:

I mean, you have to find out why. It is often that they don’t have, they haven’t known that there is another… you were raised that way yourself. You don’t have any role models so you might have tried but it didn’t work. And there is a difference between beating someone with a belt or a stick than to just spank a little. That is, for me that is two different levels of it: one is definitely abuse while the other, I don’t know, it’s a little, it is so hard to explain these things.

Further, the participants discuss good ways to discipline; such as to not allow the child to watch TV, to take away the favorite toy or to give the child a “time out” for three minutes. The participants highlight the importance of telling the child what she has done and why you are using that method of discipline, in order for the child to learn something from it. The participants discuss the need to find balance between discipline and punishment; to do so, you need to remember to listen to your child, make time for her, be available for her and ensure that the child can trust you. One participant (SW 7) give the following explanation:

For someone to have good parenting skills, it has to be someone who can raise a child like their own. Someone who would be able to discipline a child in a good manner, not someone who is gonna abuse the child, yes. They must be able to show the child some guidance, how they need to carry themselves as children, to be the better adults.
7.3.2. Good principles

The principles of the family emerged in five of the seven interviews and are stated to have a big impact on the child. As a parent you are a role model to the child; regardless what you tell the child, the child will act as you act. The participants describe this as the need to “practice what you’re preaching”. Some of the participants describe behaviors such as abusing alcohol and drugs and being violent as bad principles which make the family unsuitable; because the child will copy this behavior. As SW 4 express it:

Some people thinks like, because there’s this dacha, marijuana, some people they have farms of that. They sell it so they think it’s a good way of earning an income. But what does it, what impact does it have on other people? [...] So now how are you going to say to the children? “Do not smoke dacha”, it’s not gonna be easy to say that, you can say it but you cannot act it. And you cannot maintain that behavior on the child’s life because the child will model it because children are looking up to adults.

Two of the social workers also describe isolation, that is not participating in the community or seeing your neighbors, as a factor which makes a family unsuitable. This is because it will also make the child isolated, which is described as something negative because of the importance of being part of the community.

7.3.3. Financial skills

All seven of the interviewees agreed that financial skills is an important aspect for them to be able to place a child in the care of a family. For the biological parents who might be reunified with their child, one participant state that they have to have the child in mind when they do their budget, since the child coming back means added financial responsibilities. Concerning foster parents, the social workers make sure that they will be able to cope with the added costs, even if they might not get the foster care grant immediately. Being self-sufficient and making provision for the foster children are qualities mentioned as desirable. Having a lack of financial skills can result in not being approved to foster a child, which is explained by one participant (SW 6):

If now you spend all your money, you don’t have any money left, then it’s like, ok, your financials is not really looking good, like we closed some people because of that, mm, because I know it’s not really, because now there’s gonna be added costs with this foster child.
When asked if people solely apply to be foster parents because of the foster care grant, some of the participants’ state that this happens from time to time which according to the participants make them unsuitable. The interviewees explain how they in the process make it clear to the prospective foster parents that the grant is for the child and her needs; clothes and food for example, and that a certain amount of it has to be put into the bank to be saved for the child’s future.

7.4. The constitution of family

In the theme “the constitution of family”, five sub themes emerged: “Reunification as a primary goal”, “Family structure”, “Gender and sexuality”, “Age” and “Race and religion”. These concern the ideal family and the components of which it is made up.

7.4.1. Reunification as a primary goal

All the participants state that the primary goal for a child who has been removed from her family is to reunify her with her family of origin; not only the child’s biological parents but also with the extended family, such as grandparents or aunts to the child. The participants mention the law and permanency for the child as reasons to why reunification is the primary goal for the child. SW 3 express the importance of familiarity: “It is that you should remain in your own family, your own flesh and blood. That is what you know, that it won’t be, the culture you come from that is, like I said; there where you feel familiar.”. However, it is highlighted by two interviewees that the original family must have dealt with the problems that caused the removal of the child before reunification. Even if the child might express willingness of going back home it is important that the child does not return home as long as there is a perpetrator in the house as it is explained to be an unsafe environment for the child. Unsuitability is also exemplified by the unwillingness to take care of a child, as SW 6 describes:

In some families we found out that there is relatives and because now the mom, the lifestyle, the family doesn’t approve of the lifestyle so they just say “we don’t want anything to do with her” even if it’s a child, “we don’t want anything”. So in that case, now we cannot really place the child with that family. Then we have to find another family.

The family is also considered unsuitable if one or more of the family members does not want to receive the child; regardless if it is a child or an adult. However, even when the child is placed in
foster care, it is stated that the social workers never stop the possibility of reunifying the child with its origin family.

7.4.2. Family structure

When asked if there is a certain family structure which is preferred in the pursuit of a suitable family, most of the interviewees state that it is not so much about the structure; instead more about the stability, dedication and quality of the services provided. Several of the participants believe that both single parents, young parents and couples can be suitable. One participant state that the ideal would be to have a father figure, a mother figure, and siblings for the child’s possibility to grow up in a nuclear family. Meanwhile another participant explain that a nuclear family structure does not necessarily equal good care since the father might not even be there as a support for his children. When asked about the preferred family structure, one participant give the following answer (SW 6):

We don’t look at that really because like, in, on our bank we have a mix, it’s single parents, young parents, or couples, or, we don’t really have a criteria, that, ok, we only will, we need people that are married or we don’t take single mothers, no, we don’t have a criteria like that, yeah, so we look at each individual.

Single mothers can make up a suitable family structure while one of the interviewed explain how a household with a male only would not be safe to place a child in:

I think it’s because of the history of our country. I don’t know, we’ve seen many cases where children get abused by their fathers and stuff. But it’s not even about that because even a male, usually men need someone to take care of them, you know? (SW 5)

The participant further state that this does not automatically make that father unsuitable and said that staying with his mum or sister is just as good as having a spouse. One participant state that it all comes down to what would suit the child best; “You can’t put a big blanket in a very small suitcase.” (SW 2)
7.4.3. Gender and sexuality

Five of seven participants state that the gender of the foster parent does not influence if the parent will be suitable or not for a child. The reason is told to be due to the regulations of the law. However, two of the interviewees explain they prefer a family which consists of both a female and a male for the reason that the child needs someone who is motherly, thus a person who can take care of the child.

Regarding the aspect of sexuality, four participants state that it does not matter which sexuality the parents have, mainly because it is against the law. However, two of the interviewees express an uncertainty to screen homosexual prospective parents, as SW 1 express:

Fortunately, I’ve never been in a situation… where by maybe the child has to be, has to go back to the lesbians. […] I wonder how would we deal with that particular, bearing in mind that okey… according to the law… I don’t remember us having the policy of saying we’ll never, eh, put or place our children under the homosexual couple or under a Muslims.

Most of the participants, though, emphasize that gender and sexuality of the prospective parents do not matter. As SW 4 describe it:

Gender? No, at all. [...] We don’t set that criteria because of your gender then you cannot qualify. [...] We looking at it more in the eyes of the child’s perspective: is the child going to be able to cope with this kind of environment? Is the family, is this kind of family unit is going to be able to meet the needs of the child? So your gender, your sexuality, whatever, eh, it doesn’t really determine that you are going to be a foster parent.

7.4.4. Age

Five of the participants emphasize that the age has an impact in the assessment of the parents, especially regarding older prospective parents. Persons above the age of 65 is mentioned to be too old for reasons of the risks that the parents are not strong enough to take care of this child. To be able to place a child with an older person, you have to consider the fact that something might happen to that person. It is therefore mentioned as important to assess whether that person has someone in her network who can care for the child. Two of the participants also state that you must be 18 years or older to become a foster parent. However, it is also highlighted that the foster parent’s ability to take care of the child is assessed rather than the specific age. It is, for example,
emphasized that a person who is 60 years old but is strong and in good health can be more suitable than a 45-years-old person who might be like an 80-year-old. Therefore, it is important to look at each individual case, as stated by SW 7: “Let me mention that each and every case it has to be treated differently, not all the cases are the same. [...] So we have to consider if this person is able to look after this child.”

7.4.5. Race and religion

Among five of the interviews the aspect of race emerged: one of the interviewees say that the race of the parent does not matter, while four state the opposite. The four participants express the importance of the parents’ race being the same as the child, so the child can maintain her own culture within the family, which is also mentioned to be in the law. However, it is emphasized that placing a child with a family of another culture is possible if the child can cope with it. An example of this is when the foster mother knows about the child’s culture and language. One participant explains how to approach cases involving different races:

Let’s say it’s a white child who would come to a family that is happy, they can take any child and live out in a village, African culture but how, how will the entire community around them react? Will they approve this child? How will it be in school for this child? So you have to think about those things, what is best in the specific situation. Will the relatives approve that you have a white child or Indian child or colored child with, will they agree to that? (SW 3)

The prospective parents’ religion is also emphasized by some of the participants to have an impact on the assessment. The foster parents are valued as suitable for the child when, for instance, the parents approve that the child has another religion and are prepared to, if, for example, the child is Muslim, sometimes taking the child to a Mosque. On the other hand, two of the interviewees state that it is against the law to consider the religion in the assessment in relation to their own belief system; they state that they must screen the family even if they would not believe in the same religion. One of the participants say that because the organization is Christian and the children often are placed in Christian families, she does not know how she would react if she had to place a child in a Muslim family.
8. DISCUSSION

The four main themes which emerged in the creating of this thesis is as following: “physical safety”, “emotional aspects”, “behavioral aspects”, and “the constitution of family”. These themes are analyzed using Maslow’s theory of the hierarchy of needs (1943) and previous research.

8.1. Physical safety

Our findings suggest that shelter and the provision of food are essentials for a family to be regarded as suitable, and are considered basic needs for the child. This is also suggested in Maslow’s theory of hierarchy of needs as well as in Bergman’s study (2016). The need for clothes, shelter, water and an own bed are highlighted in our findings. These findings were also found in Bergman’s (2016) study where it was emphasized during the 1930’s that the child should have clothes and a separate bed to sleep in. Carter and van Breda (2016) found that having a clean house was the most important aspect of a suitable foster family amongst their participants, which can be interpreted as the need for a house where a child can feel safe and be free from dangers, hazards and diseases. Böning and Ferreira (2013), Bergman (2016) and Maslow (1943) all highlight the importance of a child’s health and hygiene. This can be found in our interviews where the participants discuss the foster parents’ ability to take care of the child’s health, such as taking the child to the hospital when needed.

Further described by our interviewees is the ability to attend school which is also described in Carter and van Breda’s study (2016).

The area in which the family is living is considered an important factor in order to regard a family as suitable or not; townships are in our findings regarded as unsafe areas where they would not place a child. An area could also be considered unsafe if it was in the same area as an abusive parent to the child. A safe neighborhood where the child is free from danger and fear is also found to be important in Carter and van Breda’s study (2016). In order for a child to feel safe, Maslow (1943) discuss the safety needs, and give examples such as an environment where the child is free from threats and punishment and physical assault. A common theme in our findings was that regarding alcohol and substance abuse. A home where there is alcohol is by our participants considered unsuitable due to the risks it involves, which is also highlighted in Carter and van Breda’s study (2016). In both ours and Carter and van Breda’s study the importance of a house free from abuse,
both emotional and physical, and neglect is emphasized. Having a criminal record is another factor which makes you unsuitable, as stated by our interviewees, although consideration has to be taken to what kind of crime has been committed; exemplified by one interviewee with a crime committed during apartheid such as walking on the wrong side of the street. This reminds us of how the history of injustice in South Africa still influence the social work, and the different challenges we as social workers face depending on the country and culture we work in. Therefore, it is important for social workers to be aware of the context they are working in in order to give adequate help.

In summary it is found both in our research and others, as well as in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943) how the child’s need for food, shelter and safety has to be fulfilled in order for a family to be considered suitable. Before doing our research, we did not expect the need for safety regarding the neighborhood to be highlighted to this extent, based on the cultural context we come from. Reflecting on this, we are questioning if this is caused by the individualism in Sweden compared to the collectivism in South Africa.

8.2. Emotional aspects

Above all, parents’ ability to make the child feel loved was described as the first and foremost factor they looked for in a family. The loving family was described to be able to conquer anything. The need for love is described by Maslow (1943) as the third need in the hierarchy. Carter and van Breda (2016) also highlight the unconditional love, which is stated as important among our interviewees, since this is believed to make the child feel worthy no matter how she perform. Sinclair and Wilson (2003) and Carter and van Breda (2016) emphasize that the foster parents should be affectionate and make the child feel worthy. Reflecting on the previous research and our data stating that unconditional love from the parents make the children feel worthy, this might be linked to not only the love needs but also the self-esteem needs described by Maslow (1943). Since he describes feeling worthy can result in higher self-esteem.

Maslow (1943) describe love needs as the longing for affectionate relations with people and the feeling of inclusion, which can be found in our interviews as well as in other research. In our findings it is emphasized that the relationship between the child and her parents has to be strong before the child is placed back with her parents or her foster parents to ensure that she feels safe. Mitchell et al. (2010) and Berrick and Skivenes (2012), suggest that the child should be integrated in the family before being placed. Sinclair and Wilson (2003) also emphasize the importance of treating the child as part of the family.
Our findings emphasize the significance of the child being seen, heard and acknowledged; that the child have someone to express her feelings to and someone who can understand her, which is also mentioned in Mitchell et al. (2010) and Carter and Van Breda (2016). Stability is found as an important aspect in Carter and Van Breda’s study (2016) since this is thought to bring the child a feeling of being stable and emotionally balanced. Our findings also suggest that the love, stability and support the family is giving to the child can build up her self-esteem which is acknowledged in Maslow’s (1943) self-esteem needs. Böning and Ferreira (2013) state the importance of the children developing and building up their self-confidence in their foster family and that the child should feel free in her ethnic, cultural and spiritual identity. This can be understood as Maslow’s (1943) need for self-actualization, which is the need to find yourself and your purpose in life.

Lastly, our findings suggest the importance of the parents being emotionally ready to receive a child. Trauma or other emotional barriers is seen as factors that makes a person unsuitable to receive a child. In our findings, many of the participants discuss the need for a proper motive to receive a child. We have not found any other research that acknowledge the importance of this. We are wondering if the reason for that is that it is not seen as important in the assessment or if it is taken for granted that the parents motive always is the willingness of taking care of the child. Nevertheless, this is something we find important since the emotional state of the parent will influence her ability to take care of the child.

To be considered a suitable family our findings and previous research highlight the love and the emotional support that the family should be able to provide. The parents’ ability to listen, share and provide unconditional love for the child is suggested to have a big impact on whether the parents are considered to be a suitable family or not. It is even suggested by many of the participants that love “conquers all” and is “above all environmental factors”. This is to an extent contradictory with Maslow’s (1943) theory where he describes the physiological needs to be the first that has to be fulfilled before any other need. We found it somehow surprising to find out how important the emotional aspects are in comparison to the environmental aspects of the prospective family. Given South Africa is a developing country, our preconceptions told us that the physiological needs would be of greater importance in the assessment. This tells us that regardless if you live in a developing or developed country, there will always be a need to feel loved.
8.3. Behavioral aspects

The ideal parent is in our interviews described as someone with the ability to discipline a child in the right way. To just talk things through or, to the other extreme, to threaten the child is described as inappropriate ways to discipline. The participants of our study highlight the importance of consequences for misbehavior, as well as to inform the child about why what she has done is wrong, in order for her to learn from it, which is also described in Berrick and Skivenes study (2012) and in Scholte’s (1997). Mitchell’s et al. (2010) and Maslow (1943) discuss the need for rules, responsibilities and routines for children, as well as to have parents who are fair in their parenting to avoid children feeling unsafe. These studies were all carried out in different contexts, still the same need emerged. This proves the importance of involving the child; you cannot parent in a good way if you do not talk to the child and explain to her why you do something in a certain way. This further tells us about the fundamental respect towards children and the trust in their abilities.

The need for parents to act as role models are discussed by many of our participants. To raise a child in a good manner equals acting in the right way since according to the participants, children will act as you act. Teaching the child values such as being honest, is highlighted in Carter and van Breda’s study (2016) as well. Other than this, the need for good principles is not discussed in neither of the articles we have found or in Maslow’s theory (1943). We reflect over the reason for this: is it because it is not seen as important, or maybe because it is seen as so fundamental that it is not necessary to mention? The articles we have used are from various contexts; different countries and different periods of time. It might be that the view of principles and their importance has shifted over the last 100 years; from not being seen as important since basic needs were in focus, to now: when they are seen as something so obvious in the parenting role that it does not have to be explained. Another reason for us not finding research about this could be that there simply is no research about which impact the role modeling has on the child.

Maslow (1943) suggest that humans have a need for relations and inclusion of a group. This need is mentioned in our findings, thus the interviewees discuss isolation and its effects on us. Consideration is taken in the assessments to the neighbors’ view of a family and their opinion is highly valued by the social workers. Thinking about this in a Swedish context, neighbors are rarely included in the assessment of a family, as far as we know. Since neighbors are the ones constantly close to the family and therefore have another insight, it is a good idea to involve them. Although,
our understanding is that swedes are more individualistic and does not have the same relationships with their neighbors which we have to take into account.

Financials was not mentioned as the most important factors or described thoroughly, but it was mentioned by most of the participants briefly; there simply has to be money enough to provide for the child. When discussing financials, the participants state that it is not about being rich, but rather about the ability to care for the money you have got and to spend them wisely. The participants state the importance of being able to financially care for the child; thus being self-sufficient and making provision for the child is considered good qualities. Similar thoughts are found in Carter and van Breda’s study (2016); the family must have a reasonable degree of financial stability and be able to provide for child’s basic needs.

In conclusion, being a good parent involves having good morals and teaching your child good values such as to not drink alcohol or commit crime. As a parent you also should be able to discipline in an educational way, as well as to be able to provide for your child. This tells us that parenting is more than just simply fulfill the basic needs; in order to raise the child, you also need to be aware of your actions and how they influence the child.

8.4. The constitution of family

In our findings, the participants strongly highlighted reunification with the biological family to be the primary goal for the child, with the law and permanency and familiarity for the child being the reasons. This can be understood in the light of Maslow’s (1943) safety needs, where he explains that undisrupted routines and consistency makes the child feel safe. However, it is important to acknowledge that the child’s feeling of familiarity sometimes can lead to a misunderstanding of the suitability of the family. The participants explained how the child sometimes expresses a will to go back to her abusing family, because she believes that her parents can provide her the safety that she needs, which Maslow also (1943) described can happen. This tells us that the child’s need to be safe is more complex than to simply state that the child needs permanency and familiarity. We reflect on the importance of the assessment of the original family to be done properly because even though we all might feel more familiar with our original family; the child’s safety must be first priority.

Our findings say that it is the stability, dedication and qualities together with what will suit the child best that decides whether the family is suitable; thus, it does not depend on the family structure.
However, it emerged in our findings that one of the participants would never place a child in a family consisting of a male only for safety reasons. This was explained to be because of South Africa’s history where many of the children are abused by their fathers and because of the man being unable to take care of a child. We reflected on how the history of a country can create such an impact on the view of the man. The safety, stability and parent’s ability to take care of the child is emphasized in our findings, which again can be found in Maslow’s safety needs (1943). There are some interviewees who prefer a family consisting of both a female and a male; this was explained in terms of the child needing to have a mother who can take care of her. It is also mentioned in our findings that some of the interviewees feel uncomfortable knowing they would have to place a child within a family with homosexual parents. We are wondering if this is linked to the statement of men being unsuitable parents. Our findings reveal that traditional gender roles still exist to a great extent in South Africa which can explain why homosexuals and single fathers are seen as unsuitable. This reminds us that we all have different views of gender, and that this can affect our assessments.

The child’s ability to cope was mentioned to be of importance when assessing the parent’s suitability in relation to their race and religion. Our findings reveal the importance of the parents having the same race as the child so that the child can maintain her own culture within the family. In Sinclair and Wilson’s study (2003), it was emphasized that the children should come to an environment which they recognize and can feel comfortable in. Carter and van Breda (2016) also discuss the importance of the child’s racial and cultural identity being valued by the foster parents. However, our findings suggest that parents with a different race than the child can be assessed as suitable for the child if the parents can maintain the child’s culture and if the child can cope being in a family with another race or culture. We find this very interesting from various aspects. Firstly, this tells us a bit about the impact race has in South Africa. Secondly, it is interesting to see how a person’s “race” and “culture” are described as synonyms, which we are not used to coming from a culture where we do not often talk or discuss openly about the impact race has in relation to the culture.

The importance of the child being able to maintain her religion in her new family was also highlighted. The participants emphasized that a child can be placed with parents that have another religion, if the parents are willing to let her maintain her religion. We discovered some hesitations among some of the participants when placing a child in a family which is not Christian which we assume is because the organization is based on Christian values. In Maslow’s theory (1943), self-
Esteem needs are defined as the need for a person to be recognized and appreciated for who she is. This can be related to the child’s need to maintain her religion in the family since that is a big part of who she is. Thus we acknowledge the impact religion might have in the assessment of finding a suitable family and wonder if the ideal family would look different if the organization would be based on another religion.

To summarize, different aspects of the family were found to possibly have an impact when deciding if the family is suitable or not. Finding that some participants expressed a need for both a female and a male, while others state that this is not necessary, shows us that the outcome of an assessment really depends on the screener. What they all have in common is that they all refer to the safety of the child as the reason of these values. They also explain how they focus on the best interest of the child; for instance, when it comes to the aspects of religion and race, they underline the importance of the child’s possibility to maintain her own culture and religion.

8.5. Suggestions for further research

In our findings, we analyzed the aspects which the social workers at the organization found to be most important in order to assess a family as suitable to care for a child. What is almost more important than the “what” is the “how.” How do they ensure it is a suitable family? How do they carry out the assessment process? Because only when we know how the work is being carried out we can say if this is a good process which will bring a good outcome for the child or not. Therefore, we suggest further research about the actual process for assessing the families. This can, for example, be carried out via observations - joining social workers in their everyday life to see how they meet prosper foster families. What do they do? Where do they meet? Which topics and questions are being brought up and not?

One aspect which we found very important was the cultural. We knew in advance that there would be cultural differences compared to Sweden, but which are the actual differences between different countries and culture? And how much does the culture actually influence or impact the assessment of finding suitable families and/or the field of social work? This, too, is suggested for further research since it can show how much a country’s culture actually influence social work and what a social worker in advance need to know before working in a country with another culture.
8.6. Discussion of method

In this section is the discussion regarding the chosen method of the study and the implementation of it.

To use interviews as our method of data gathering suited our research questions well. We chose semi-structured interviews, meaning we used open-ended questions with a flexibility in how they were asked, such as in which order (Padgett, 2017). We could also have used assessment data as part of our method, since the social workers have a lot of forms and checklists on which they base their assessments. The law is also influencing the work to a great extent. But having used those data only would mean that we lost the ability to get the social workers’ own perspectives; instead we would only get a formalized, homogeneous perspective. Initially we thought about basing our thesis on both mentioned methods, but the time limit was too short for us to have enough time to handle and sort out all that material. We could have done a focus group to get a discussion going, which could possibly lead to the interviewees questioning each other and bringing further explanations and depth to their answers. This was not our goal; but instead it was to get the seven different perspectives and for them to give individual descriptions without influencing each other.

Since some of the interviewed social workers were involved in the work with foster families, and some in the work with the original families, we chose to use different interview guides. We also chose to change our questions after our first interview, since we found them to be too broad and too many. Regarding the different guides for different work areas, it can be questioned whether we should have used two different ones or not. However, the questions were mainly similar with the main difference being the including or excluding of the word “foster.” Concerning the change of our interview questions after our first interview, we can, in hindsight, realize that the best option would have been to have a pilot test where we could have seen which questions to include and not, and thus being able to have the same questions from the start (Padgett, 2017). Since the time limit was short, we did not see this as a possible option. Changing the questions after the first interview also raised concerns if we should still include her answers to the later deleted questions in our thesis, since she would be the only one to have answered them. Although, many of the deleted questions still, in one way or other, got answered in the other interviews as well, since they were closely related to the topic and the other questions.
Having one of our interviews in Swedish meant the need for us to later translate it. Translating interviews includes a risk of distortion, and to try to avoid this we translated as closely as possible to the intended meaning (Padgett, 2017). There is also a risk for misinterpretation, but we tried to minimize it by both reading every translated section. If there would have been a need we did have the consent to contact the interviewee with further questions. This also applied for the South African terms and local dialects, which were unfamiliar to us. To be sure we understood the interviewees, we sometimes contacted them after the interview and asked them to explain a word or expression.

When choosing who to ask to participate in our study, we consulted our gatekeeper, as well as manager of child protection, who then talked to the social workers and informed them of our study; thus the initial consent came from her. From an ethical perspective, we have to acknowledge the power aspect of the social workers being told about our study from their manager and thereby the possibility of them feeling forced to participate to obey their manager. Thus we were careful to give them the consent form in time and to emphasize that participation is voluntary. Still, we will not know if this completely eliminated this risk.

8.7. Conclusions

Approximately 400 000 children are estimated to be living in foster care in South Africa in 2018 (South African Social Security Agency, 2018). To ensure these children are able to grow up in a secure family and to develop in a healthy way, it is important to acknowledge the individual social worker’s conception of a suitable family since we believe this influence her assessment. We remind ourselves about the importance of being aware of our values and norms, and not consider them to be the ultimate truth, to ensure this does not affect our assessments to a large extent. This applies to all social workers, regardless if they live in South Africa, Sweden, or anywhere else in the world.

The four main themes which emerged in the creating of this thesis is as following: “physical safety”, “emotional aspects”, “behavioral aspects”, and “the constitution of family”. The themes “physical safety” and “emotional aspects” were the most emphasized. Within these, the sub themes “love and care” and “housing and neighborhood” were those they paid most attention to.

Our findings reveal that the most important factor for a family to be regarded as suitable is love. It was mentioned by all participants that the parents need to make the child feel loved at all times, understand the child and where she is coming from, and have the will to care for her. Despite this,
the social workers explain that without access to food and shelter, the family would not be suitable. Similar ideas are found in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs where it is explained that a person has not only one need, but several, and that it is when all the needs are fulfilled that the person can be their true self. Overall, above the emotional, behavioral and environmental areas of a child’s life is the need for safety; without safety she will never be able to develop to her full potential. In conclusion, this brings us back to the vision of the organization: “Children in secure families”.
9. LIST OF REFERENCES


10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1- interview guide for the Swedish interview

**Tema: Om den intervjuade**
Fråga #1: Hur länge har du jobbat på organisationen?
Fråga #2: Vad är din roll här?
Fråga #3: Vilken utbildning har du?

**Tema: Typer av placering**
Fråga #4: Vilka är de olika möjliga placeringstyperna för barnet efter att ha varit hos er?
   Följfråga:
   * Vilken är den vanligaste?
   * Varför?

Fråga #5: Är återförening med familjen det främsta målet?

**Tema: Passande föräldrar**
Fråga #6: Hur ser den ideala (foster) familjen ut enligt dig?
   Följfråga:
   * Finns det en särskild familjestruktur som föredras?
   * Förväntas föräldrarna ha olika roller i förhållandet till barnet?

Fråga #7: Enligt dig, vad är bra föräldraegenskaper? Hur bedömer du om föräldrarna har dom?
Fråga #8: Vilka behov förväntas (foster) föräldrarna fylla?
   Följfråga:
   * Vad ses som en bra uppväxt?

**Tema: Opassande föräldrar**
Fråga #9: Vad karakteriseras en opassande familj?
Fråga #10: Tror du att behovet av ett ”foster care grant” är anledningen till att vissa vill bli fosterföräldrar?

**Tema: Bedömning**
Fråga #11: Beskriv i stora drag processen av att utreda och välja fosterfamiljer.
Följdfråga:

*Hur mycket väger barnets röst in i valet/matchningen av fosterfamilj?*

Fråga #12: Har organisationen särskilda kriterier för en lämplig familj som du baserar din bedömning på?

Följdfråga:

*Vem utformade dessa kriterier? Används de på en nationell nivå?*

Fråga #13: I din bedömning, tar du hänsyn till aspekter såsom kön, ålder, religiös åskådning, hudfärg och sexuell läggning av den möjliga fosterfamiljen och hur dessa aspekter matchar eller inte matchar barnets?

**Tema: När placering har skett**

Fråga #14: Gör ni uppföljningar av placeringarna?

Följdfråga:

*Hur?*

*Under hur lång tid?*

Fråga #15: Vad händer om placeringen inte funkar?

Följdfråga:

*Kan barnet informera dig om han/hon tycker att placeringen inte funkar, och i så fall, hur hanterar du den informationen?*
Appendix 2- Interview guide foster care

**Domain: About the interviewee.**
Sample question #1: For how long have you worked at the organization?
Sample question #2: What is your role here?
Sample question #3: Which level of education do you have?

**Domain: Family placements.**
Sample question #4: Is reunification with the family the primary goal?
Probe for:
- *If that is the case, why?*

**Domain: Suitable foster parents.**
Sample question #5: What does the ideal foster family look like to you?
Probe for:
- *Is there a certain family structure which is preferred or most common?*
Sample question #6: In your opinion, what are good parenting skills? How do you assess whether the foster parents have those?
Probe for:
- *Which needs are foster parents expected to fulfill?*
- *What is regarded as a proper childhood?*

**Domain: Unsuitable foster parents.**
Sample question #7: What characterizes an unsuitable foster family?
Sample question #8: Do you have any concerns that the need of a foster care grant is the reason why some people want to be foster families?

**Domain: Assessment.**
Sample question #9: Do you have certain criteria for a suitable family which you base your assessment on?
Probe for:
- *Who designed the criteria for a suitable family? Are they used on a national level?*
Sample question #10: In your assessment, do you consider aspects such as gender, age, religion, race, and sexuality of the prospective foster families and how they match or don’t match the child?
Appendix 3 - interview guide kinship care/ reunification

**Domain: About the interviewee.**
Sample question #1: For how long have you worked at the organization?
Sample question #2: What is your role here?
Sample question #3: Which level of education do you have?

**Domain: Family placements.**
Sample question #4: Is reunification with the family the primary goal?
Probe for:
- *If that is the case, why?*

**Domain: Suitable parents.**
Sample question #5: What does the ideal family look like to you?

Probe for:
- *Is there a certain family structure which is preferred or most common?*

Sample question #6: In your opinion, what are good parenting skills? How do you assess whether the parents have those?

Probe for:
- *Which needs are the parents expected to fulfill?*
- *What is regarded as a proper childhood?*

**Domain: Unsuitable parents.**
Sample question #7: What characterizes an unsuitable family?

**Domain: Assessment.**
Sample question #8: Do you have certain criteria which must be fulfilled before the child can be reunited with their family?

Probe for:
- *Who designed these criteria? Are they used on a national level?*
Sample question #9: In your assessment of placements with relatives; do you consider aspects such as gender, age, religion, race, and sexuality of the relatives and how they match or don’t match the child?
Appendix 4- Informed consent form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigators:
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Department: Social work
Institution: School of health and welfare, Jönköping University
Project Title: In search for secure families- A study of what qualifies as a suitable family for vulnerable children at a child protection organization in South Africa
Expected Duration: 10 weeks

Supervisor:
Aimée Ekman, senior lecturer at JU University.
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Purpose and Background
You are invited to participate in a study of the assessment of a suitable family at a child protection organization. We hope to learn your methods of securing a safe future for children. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you work as a social worker at this organization. This study is being conducted as part of our social work degree.

Procedures
If you decide to participate, we Linnéa Dahl and Hanna Sandström, bachelor students at JU, will interview approximately 6 social workers at the organization. This to get the varied view of different professionals working with the families. They will each take 45 minutes to an hour. Besides this we will do document analysis for a broader insight.

Risks/Discomforts
Participating in the study may include facing sensitive questions which might create discomfort.

Benefits

There may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that we provide may bring a new perspective on children’s needs and how to find a suitable family which can be useful for social workers.

Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. The interview will be transcribed, and heard only by the investigators. The material provided will be used for this study only.

Questions

If you have questions, please ask us.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

Participation

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future relationship with the investigators.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. After signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study you may do so within a week after the interview. Any longer would affect the production of the study.

________________________________________________________________
Signature                                      Date

________________________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator                    Date