



The voices of children, mothers, and fathers: Can parenting programs improve reunification processes in the Spanish child protection system?

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ABSTRACT

Parental education programs are a key element in achieving family reunification because they help mothers and fathers improve their parenting skills and increase the parent-child relationship. Perceptions of change are examined among children and parents who participated in Spain's "Caminar en familia" ("Walking family") program, which was implemented among families served by the Sistema de Protección a la Infancia y a la Adolescencia (System for the Protection of Children and Adolescents). A qualitative design enabled comprehensively describing the experiences of families in the Spanish Child Protection System. A discussion group was the main data collection source. Study participants were from 16 families (23 parents and 20 children), either preparing to return home or newly reunified, and had completed Modules 3 and 4 of the program. The results indicated that the program contributed to increasing families' awareness of their parenting-related abilities, skills, and competencies, and helped them understand the need for making adjustments as part of coexistence and preparations for adaptations in family dynamics to facilitate the children's return home. This research highlights the importance of involving parents and their children in improving parenting skills and the reunification process by implementing parental education programs through a unique work plan.

1. Introduction

According to Fernandez (2013), family reunification is defined as the return of children placed in protective care to the home of their birth family and is the primary goal of most foster care systems and the most common permanency-related planning decision. In abandonment situations that have been caused by acts of abuse or neglect in families, the protection of children and adolescents often involves temporarily separating the child from their birth family. Regardless of whether a foster or residential foster care measure is adopted, it is necessary to work with the birth family to ensure that the child or adolescent can return home safely. These decisions regarding separation and reunification hold special relevance in children's lives because of their short- and long-term influences (Farmer, 2014). Furthermore, these decisions can also have a large impact on children's family life.

Although family reunification has been a relatively neglected area in child protection research, according to Delfabbro et al. (2013), family reunification is currently an important area for international research. While research in this area is still scarce, it currently focuses on two major areas (Fernandez & Lee, 2013): (1) studies aimed at identifying reunification patterns and the measurement of their predictors, and (2) studies aimed at identifying re-entry patterns (re-entry into care) and the measurement of their predictors. Research has been even poorer with regard to results that can guide the practice (Farmer & Patsios, 2016). The scarce and recent findings in this regard have helped to identify four predictors for successful reunification efforts, and have also been influential in orientating socio-educational interventions: (a) the proactive action on care plan from the moment of foster care, (b) existence of services and support to the families throughout the intervention, (c) development of a specific plan to prepare for the return, and (d)

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presence of support after reunification (Biehal, 2006; Davies & Ward, 2012; Thoburn, Robinson, & Anderson, 2012).

Renewed interest in the topic of reunification can be attributed to the fact that statistics highlight increasing the family reunification rate as an important challenge for international childcare services. In Spain, this rate does not include the 20 % of cases involving children who have been placed in foster care, as more than 80 % do not return to their birth family before reaching legal age (Ministerio de Sanidad, Consumo y Bienestar Social [Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs, and Social Welfare], 2018). In other countries, the percentages of reunification are higher, with as many as 51 % of the children leaving the child protection service to return to their parents or primary caregivers (Mainey et al., 2009).

2. Returning to the birth family

The moment of returning home is a turning point in the entire reunification process, and specific work is necessary to prepare families for it. However, professionals, parents (Balsells et al., 2014; Huscroft-D'Angelo et al., 2019), and the children (Mateos et al., 2017) perceive that the usual practices of socio-educational interventions often lack this specific work.

What topics are important with regard to preparing for the return home? What aspects indicated by the scientific literature could guide professional practice during this phase? In the "return home" phase, a clear awareness of the progress that has allowed children to return home was one of the strengths indicated by Lietz and Strength (2011). While families recognize the changes that have made reunification possible, they hold an attitude of positive reinforcement toward these changes and a positive view of the situation. In this regard, Osterling and Han (2011) discuss the self-assessment of family progress as a factor for the consolidation of reunification.

Balsells, Mateos, Urrea, & Vaquero, (2018) pointed out that awareness of progress is an influential factor for determining the likelihood of returning home, specifically in two aspects: (1) the parental role in understanding changes and (2) parental self-efficacy for living positively.

According to the ecosystem model, this self-assessment of progress should be subjected to a realistic analysis of the ecology of parenting: the capacity of parents to respond to their child's needs and characteristics of the family and social environments (Lacharité, 2017). In this regard, an increasing number of authors have advocated for the adoption of an ecosystemic model. The United Kingdom has been a pioneer in developing ecosystemic and developmental models. The resulting Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families (FACNF) model presents three components that can influence child development: children's developmental needs, parenting capacity, and family and environmental factors.

Regarding children's needs, research has demonstrated that parents have to "get to know them again" to adapt to their new needs. These needs emerge because of developmental changes the child may have suffered during foster care and new customs and routines that the children may have adopted while in a foster family or residential center (Balsells et al., 2013). Stephens et al. (2017) found that the returning children were described as being "new people" and that the parents would have to learn about them. This "newness" was sometimes connected to the length of time children spent in foster care; at times, the children who returned to the home were at a very different developmental stage than they had been when they left. This was also the case in other norms and practices of daily life. The need to actively involve children in this process was another need identified by the research: giving children a voice and greater visibility in the process of returning home allows parents to express greater adjustment and adaptability (Balsells et al., 2013).

Parental skills are an essential element for family reunification. Authors such as Delfabbro et al. (2013) identify these competencies as

predictors for family reunification. Two specific parental skills of the return home phase (Balsells et al., 2018) include (1) adapting educational practices to the new needs of children and (2) adjusting the exercise of parental and educational skills to the new reality of the family. In relation with parenting capacity and family and environmental factors, some research highlights the important role of the contact visits and relationships between foster children and their birth family for an adequate home return (Chesmore et al., 2017; Delgado et al., 2019; Goemans et al., 2016).

Thus, it is important to ensure that during the reunification process, parents know and acknowledge that their children may express contradictory feelings such as loyalty conflicts or a refusal to return home. However, parents may also experience conflicting feelings such as joy or fear toward the return of the children, and proper emotional management work is necessary in this regard (Ghaffar et al., 2012).

These processes, which aim to adjust and adapt educational skills to children's new needs, should receive new support within the family context. Rock et al. (2015) suggested that ensuring diversity in social support and improving the convenience of integrating formal and informal support is a necessary strategy for responding to the needs of parents and children at this stage. Giallo et al. (2013) noted that parents in poor quality relationships and those who have higher social support needs have fewer personal resources available to engage in play and learning activities with their children. Coyl et al. (2010) demonstrated that parents who seek social support, particularly family support, are more likely to be involved in their children's lives and less likely to use physical punishment as a discipline strategy for their children. Additionally, families often demand support and follow-up services during the return home process (Balsells, Pastor, Molina, Fuentes-Peláez, & Vázquez, 2016; Berrick, Cohen, & Anthony, 2011; Lee, Hwang, Socha, Pau, & Shaw, 2012), as they often require formal assistance for developing their parental skills to overcome the personal and structural difficulties that arise during this new stage.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2011) recommends child protection services-run training programs as a key element for reunification and recommends these training programs to empower these families. In this regard, the following types of programs are especially effective: programs aimed at improving the quality of the parent-child relationship through work on specific skills (Balsells et al., 2018; Dakof et al., 2010), programs dedicated to meeting specific educational needs at each stage of the reunification process (Balsells, Amorós, Fuentes-Peláez, & Mateos, 2011; López & Del Valle, 2015; Palacios & Amorós, 2006), and programs for promoting informal support among families in the protection system (Chambers et al., 2019). From an ecological and family-type perspective, which promotes the quality of the family as a functioning system through comprehensive, lasting, multi-domain, and multi-context interventions, the effectiveness of these programs has been demonstrated (Dakof et al., 2010; Rodrigo, 2003).

Despite the demonstrated efficacy of these programs, there is still a knowledge gap regarding how training programs could be used as a support for improving specific parenting skills in the return home process.

3. Current study

Considering the extant scientific literature-based evidence, several questions arise: Can parental education programs improve families' preparation for returning home of children? Can they contribute toward improving families' emotional management and reconstruction of coexistence when returning home of children? Can they increase the self-assessments of family progress?

Thus, this article presents the results of a study that aimed to examine the effectiveness of the "Walking family" program, a parenting skills development program for improving foster care and family reunification (Balsells et al., 2015). Specifically, this study aimed to

analyze perceptions of changes related to family progress, which made possible the return home of children who were in foster care and had participated in the “Walking family” program with their parents.

4. Methods

4.1. Research design

The current research was developed using a qualitative design, and it had a comprehensive descriptive purpose. This method allows us to approach the experiences, feelings, and opinions of the main stakeholders by recording their own words. Likewise, it allowed us to acknowledge the meanings that families assigned to their experience of participating in the “Walking family” program. This is a parental skills development program aimed at foster care and family reunification and consists of two independent parts. The first part has two modules (Modules 1 and 2) that deal with parenting skills related to foster care. The second part also has two modules (Modules 3 and 4) that deal with preparations for returning home. The fifth module is a reinforcement module (Module 5). Each module includes three sessions where three types of activities are carried out: (1) group activities for parents, (2) simultaneous activities for children, and (3) family activities (parents and children together).

4.2. Sample and instruments

The “Walking family” program was implemented in different regions of Spain for families served by the Sistema de Protección a la Infancia y a la Adolescencia (System for the Protection of Children and Adolescents), a national and public service.

A total of 107 families started the program with the Modules 1 and 2 (Mateos, Vaquero, Urrea, & Parra, 2020) in different regions of Spain during 2–3 consecutive months. After a few weeks, the Modules 3 and 4 were performed only by 16 families (Table 1) that were preparing the return home or were newly reunified. The participants were 23 parents and 20 children (Table 2) of the families that performed the Modules 3 and 4 during 3–4 consecutive months between 2017 and 2018. In all cases children maintain contact with their parents during the intervention.

The discussion group was the main information collection technique used in this study (Balsells, Amorós, Fuentes-Peláez, & Mateos, 2011; Hennink, 2013). However, information was also collected through interviews when researchers only had the opportunity to meet one participant and developing a group of more than two participants was not possible.

This research utilized five discussion groups or interviews: two discussion groups involving fathers and mothers (G_FM), one interview involving a mother (I_FM), one discussion group involving children (G_C), and one interview involving a daughter (I_C).

A document was prepared to collect data from the abovementioned

Table 1
Characteristics of the families participating in the program.

Characteristics	Families (n = 16)	%
Type of family unit		
Marriage or domestic partnership	7*	43.8 %
Single-parent family	5	31.3 %
Reconstructed family	4	25.0 %
Family Figures that participated in the program		
Only mother	9	56.2 %
Only father	0	0.0 %
Both mother and father	7*	43.8 %
Origin of the family		
Local	14	87.5 %
Foreign	2	12.5 %
Mean age of parents	43.37	

* 7 Families were composed by 1 father and 1 mother, being 14 participants.

Table 2
Characteristics of the children participating in the program.

Characteristics	Children (n = 20)	%
Gender		
Female	7	35.0 %
Male	13	65.0 %
Age		
5–8 years	2	10.0 %
9–12 years	5	25.0 %
13–16 years	10	50.0 %
older than 17 years	3	15.0 %
Protective measure before reunification		
Kinship foster care (KC)	1	5.0 %
Out-of-home foster care (FC)	2	10.0 %
Residential foster care (RC)	15	75.0 %
Other/on response/don't know	2	10.0 %

discussion groups containing three sections: (a) the participants' identification data, (b) researchers' observations regarding the relevant data that was considered especially important in terms of data collection, and (c) the question script. The “Walking family” program's objectives served as the basis for developing the question script (Table 3). The language of the questions was adapted to this study's relevant contexts and the contexts of the participants in the discussion groups or interviews.

4.3. Procedures (analytic strategy)

Data collection took place shortly after implementing the program to encourage participants to remember their experience in detail. The discussions and interviews were recorded in audio and transcribed verbatim to ensure the information's accuracy. Before starting the session, the procedures and rules were explained to the participants, and they were asked to sign an informed consent form.

The informed consent document contained the study's objectives and scientific purpose, the participants' rights, and explanations regarding the confidential treatment of participating families' data. This document was provided to the parents before the discussion groups were formed, and they were encouraged to ask any questions they may have had to ensure their willingness to participate in the study. The children

Table 3
Question script for the discussion groups.

Children	Parents
Do you find the sessions dealing with returning home useful for knowing the changes and achievements that your parents had achieved so far?	Did you find the sessions on “return home” preparations useful for knowing the changes and achievements you had achieved so far?
Explain some of these changes and achievements.	Did these sessions help you understand your emotions and those of your children regarding the return home?
Did these sessions help you understand your emotions and those of your parents regarding the return home?	Can you give us an example from your family life where these sessions have helped you?
Can you provide an example from your family life where these sessions have helped you?	
Did the sessions related to the first days at home help you know and remember your support network (such as family, friends, professionals, and other people who help you)?	Did the sessions on the first days at home help you know and remember your support network (such as family, friends, associations, technicians, and other people who help you)?
Did the sessions favor coexistence at home? In what sense?	Did the sessions favor coexistence at home?
Did participating in this program help you advance in the reunification process with your parents?	How has participating in the “Walking family” program helped you in the reunification process?
How have you improved?	
What changes have you made?	
What parts of the program have helped you the most in this improvement?	

provided their assent and had the authorization and consent of their parents to participate and of their foster parents or tutors when were necessary. The participants' anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed based on the project, which was presented to and approved by the Bioethics Commission of the relevant university where this study was carried out. For further details, please see the title page of the paper.

The information analysis was conducted through a content analysis based on the grounded theory of [Glasser and Strauss \(1967\)](#). The system of analysis categories was developed by collecting information from the participants and relating them to the literature's conceptual contributions. The system contained a description of these analysis categories and their dimensions. This analysis process thus ensured the credibility of the research and reliability and validity of the study ([Gibbs, 2012](#)). Before applying this system, it was reviewed by various researchers to check and judge its validity.

The results of this category system were translated into the thematic network illustrated in [Fig. 1](#). The category system was used for coding all the discussion groups and interviews. The text was coded simultaneously by two researchers based on the homogeneity of the established system of categories. The Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis tool was used for supporting this process.

The research team had supervisory skills and criteria to adequately identify the major issues arising from the discussions in the groups or interviews involving the parents and children. Although we encountered the same family experiences—more or less—obtaining information from both parties and the triangulation of this information allowed us to interpret different perspectives and “angles” on the same reality.

5. Results

The content analysis of the responses of parents and the children allowed us to identify certain changes that emerged after the families participated in the “Walking family” program and returned home—specifically, changes related to (a) awareness about achievements and changes after returning home and (b) adjustments in coexistence and family dynamics.

The study results indicated that the children's return home was made possible thanks to their parents' impetus, which was strengthened by the changes and advances they made to their parental skills to meet their children's well-being and quality of life needs.

Regarding parenting skills, the data analysis demonstrated that the program had helped raise families' awareness about their abilities,

skills, and competencies in parenting. This awareness developed gradually as parents and their children reflected on their experienced foster care processes and family trajectories. On the verge of the return home, the participants verbalized how completing the program allowed them to recognize their ability to develop parenting skill:

“I have discovered that I had the skills. Then, I discovered that [the solution] was in me. Next, I have taken out all the skills that I had inside—that, before, I did not even think I had—and I have discovered them.” (G_FM_2)

The parents emphasized that they became more aware of their potential to meet their children's needs. This motivated them to recover and adapt certain elements of the context to welcome their children back to the family home:

“It has been tremendous because, before, I was hopeless as a mother, and I did not take good care of my son. Now, I want to continue living, recover, and take care of my son.” (G_FM_2)

Similarly, children recognized changes in the abilities of their parents—especially regarding the organization of family life and the establishment of norms and limits. They also stated that they were aware of their parents' limitations. This encouraged them to regard the changes they noticed in their parents with positive and proactive attitudes:

“I think that the program is helping my mother a lot because she didn't know how to show us how to do the housework [...]. Since she's been here, she has learned to tell me, “this is my home, these are my rules, and if you do not abide by them, you will have to leave.” (I_C_1)

This awareness and recognition regarding improvements in parental skills contributes toward improving families' progress in their perception of their parental self-efficacy; furthermore, this creates a greater awareness of their limitations and potential as parents, which contributes to improving family relationships.

The study results demonstrated that the program enriched participants' awareness of the need to make adjustments in coexistence and prepare adaptations in family dynamics and how these actions could facilitate their children's return home.

Fathers and mothers discussed the difficulties they faced in making adjustments after a long period of foster care. After this period, the children often return home with age and maturation changes, which are

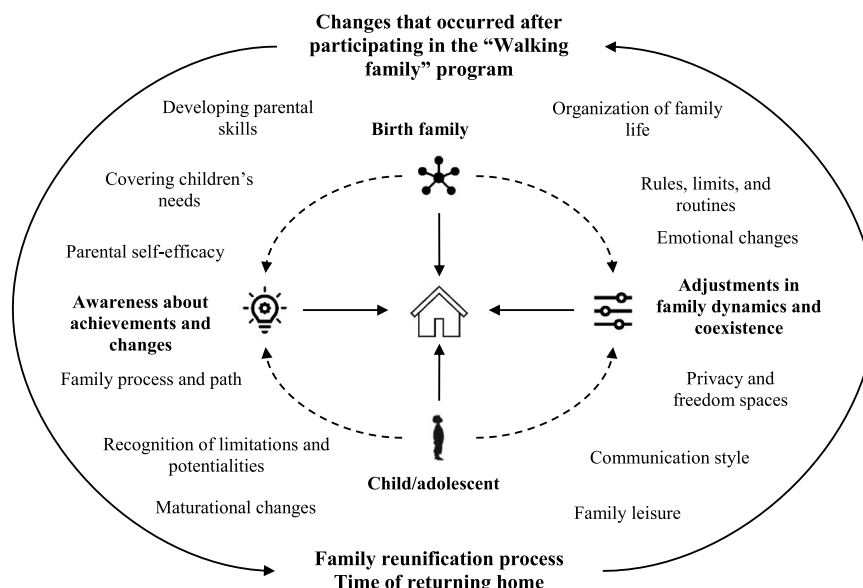


Fig. 1. Changes that emerged after the families participated in the “Walking family” program and returned home (the two-column fitting image).

sometimes very important. The age change is a factor that has been widely observed in the literature, and it must be considered carefully as it concerns adjustments related to children's needs. Children's transition to adolescence and the changes in their educational centers are critical events that can increase vulnerability in the family and pose barriers for any adaptations aimed at improving the new coexistence in the family—an area where many families require more intense support:

"It has overwhelmed us—now, he has completely changed from child to adolescent—and we practically do not know him because it is a brutal change [...] and we have asked the social educator for help." (G_FM_2)

Similarly, the children pointed out that in the beginning, they found it difficult to adapt to the new family coexistence dynamics after they had left the foster care resources behind. First, they recognized that at home, they demanded higher levels of freedom (compared to what they had experienced in the foster home) and greater personal space. Second, they described the difficulties they faced in adjusting their communication style, especially in conflict situations; however, they derived great positive value from the fact that their parents paid more attention to them and from their parents efforts to initiate conversations:

"Now, [my mother] is not that annoying. At first, she seemed to be watching me. Now, maybe, she leaves me alone for a while [...]. Between her working and everything, there is not much time, and it's not that she does not dedicate any time to me, but of course [...] at our age [...] the parents[...]." (G_C_1)

All the participants highlighted the difficulties they faced in establishing norms and limits. These generated feelings of insecurity and fear regarding the re-establishment of coexistence. During the first few days of living together, the children were sensitive and susceptible to emotional changes. Additionally, both parents and children tended to compare daily foster care life to daily home life. Faced with these situations, parents reported that they often felt a sense of insecurity when setting limits. However, children viewed the home rules positively, although they emphasized that they wanted their parents to respect their personal space and organization:

"The first few days, you could not say no, because he would cry. And so, we were afraid of [...] if we are not doing anything to him [...]. He would cry [...]. Additionally, we were afraid: What were we doing wrong?" (G_FM_2)

Both parents and children agreed that it was necessary to adjust coexistence with flexible routines, guidelines, and rules. This aspect, together with the fact that sharing leisure activities facilitated family dynamics, improved the parents' security regarding their parental exercise and the children's confidence, which helped to reconcile the various challenges in returning and spending the first days at home.

All the participant responses demonstrated that the program supported families in managing their new family dynamic through a process of mutual adjustment and adaptation between parents and children, where the roles of the former as establishers of guidelines for coexistence and the roles of the latter as active subjects and participants in decisions concerning themselves were recognized.

6. Discussion

The study results, which indicated the change-related perceptions of both parents and children who participated in the "Walking family" program, allowed us to analyze how they viewed their family reunification process.

First, this family perception-based research allowed us to explore the relevant features for family reunification: awareness about progress and self-assessment of the parenting ecosystem. Asking involved stakeholders about their reality and how they had lived and felt allowed them to self-assess their progress. Osterling and Han (2011) acquired new

knowledge about the situation of foster care and stated that building awareness regarding family achievements that have led to reunification requires a demonstration of recognition regarding the family's change-related parental abilities. This can increase the family's feelings of effectiveness and control regarding any given situation (Lemay, 2013). The results showed how parents and children reflected and increased their awareness of their skills and competencies in parenting—whether these were strengths or shortcomings. Thus, in this regard, the family's engagement in the context of child welfare practice (Toros et al., 2018) is fundamental for moving forward.

The concept of family engagement is associated with family members' active involvement and the collaboration between families and social service professionals; here, the quality of any relevant relationships is emphasized. The families' perceptions regarding their realities allowed us to understand their motivation, attitudes, and commitment to change (Lindsey et al., 2014; Staudt, 2007). Thus, this participatory approach considers the family's viewpoint as the central element for understanding the needs of the children and advancing the care plan (Balsells et al., 2018). The philosophy of the strength-based participatory approach is increasingly being used for examinations; this research trend has been reflected in a growing number of studies on child neglect and abuse (Chamberland et al., 2015; Léveillé & Chamberland, 2010; Milani et al., 2011). This type of intervention focuses on maximizing families' strengths and accompanying them in making choices to improve their situation rather than on imposing solutions. Hopefully, many constructive solutions will be found to address this double issue (Bérubé et al., 2017).

Second, participating parents amended their assessments regarding children's active participation in decisions about returning home and family life. The parents in this study were more realistic with regard to their children's needs as well as their abilities to propose, discuss, and agree upon rules that would be beneficial for both parties and favor the return home. In recent years, children's active role in aspects that affect them has been widely studied and attested (Bouma, López-López, Knorth, & Grietens, 2018; Collins, 2017; Mateos, Vaquero, Urrea, & Parra, 2020) in accordance with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This approach holds that the child is competent and capable and that a parent's role is to help the child exercise their rights by providing appropriate direction and guidance based on the child's evolving capacities. Thus, translated into the family setting, values such as mutual respect, equal dignity, authenticity, integrity, and responsibility are the foundations for developing parent-child relationships that promote children's rights (Daly & Abela, 2007).

Additionally, as illustrated by the study results, children contribute a different perspective to the same reality (Templeton et al., 2020). However, they favor necessary family changes, as they motivate their parents to perform the necessary actions for reunification. Likewise, it allows children to feel involved in their reunification process and that of their families, encouraging them to become empowered and function as active agents of change. Along with the progressive work conducted throughout the fostering and reunification processes, children's active role is associated with successful reunification (Wade et al., 2011).

Third, these study results confirmed a review by Maltais et al. (2019). Their systematic review of the literature demonstrated that the most effective interventions for promoting changes for the parents of children in foster care and reunifications involved the family and aimed to modify interactions in the family or in the parent-child relationship. The results suggested the effectiveness of the proposed intervention in the "Walking family" program as well as that of children's direct and active involvement, as they became agents of change for their parents. As the program was aimed at both parents and children, this multiplied its effects and attested that these children could intervene even more in their parents' parental skills development.

Finally, the study results identified how effective adaptations and reconstructions in family coexistence require an understanding of the exercise of parenting, which is carried out through interactions and

continuous changes. Thus, it is important to recognize that family reunification processes can be lengthy (Goemans et al., 2016). If the family needs change—either because of the children's age, their maturity, or their development during the foster care period—the implications for parenting will also change. In this regard, it is also important to consider and understand parents' characteristics (Jedwab et al., 2018) and children's capacities to contribute to the stability and organization of family life. According to Landers and Danes (2016):

As ecological systems theory applies to families in child welfare, children and parents are seen as embedded within the parent-child dyad, within the family system as a whole, within their child welfare plan, within the child welfare system, within their particular cultural and social context, within their neighborhood and surrounding community. (p. 139)

Similarly, the family reunification process includes multiple levels and reflects interactions between individuals (children, parents, and the family) and varying systems (caseworkers, agencies, communities, and court systems; Akin, 2011).

6.1. Limitations

The present study has some limitations due to the use of discussion groups as the main collection data technique, which included sensitive topics such as child protection. Additionally, children often become tired of explaining their stories to different people, and they find it difficult to express themselves orally. In this sense, techniques that favor different communication styles have not been applied, although the adaptations of the language of the text and establishment of good communication at the beginning of the group were used. However, families do not know if their participation will affect their intervention plan and could have been reluctant to respond. To mitigate this effect, the leaders of the discussion groups were researchers and not related to the protection system, a safe atmosphere was created, and the families were reassured that their information would not be passed on to the protection professionals. It is considered appropriate to take into account these limitations for future research.

6.2. Lessons learned

Future direction for social work practice in this regard is to introduce a single work plan where both the work of the child's life story and the family care plan can be jointly articulated. This process focuses on facilitating the evolution of networking practices (where one team works with parents and the other works with children) toward a unique and holistic version of the care plan. The proposal involves different teams working simultaneously and consequently, achieving better-quality parenting as well as work related to the child's life story. This approach would thus extend the position defended by Kosher & Ben-Arieh (2020, p. 6):

The traditional association between the state, the family, and the child could be conceptualized as a series of concentric circles with the child at the center. The CRC implies that this association should now be understood to be triangular (i.e., child, family, and state—each at an angle/corner), with the state having a direct responsibility toward the child to promote her/his rights.

6.3. Future research

Similarly, one future research should explore conflicts that could occur when rights of protection are contrasted with rights of participation established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Bouma et al., 2020). According to Kosher and Ben-Arieh (2020), it is necessary to improve practices and policies where, in addition to receiving protection, children can contribute directly to deliberations and meetings,

despite the potential conflicts that may arise when children perceive hostility, conflict, and disagreement.

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Declaration of Interest statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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