

2nd to 5th October 2018

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**EUSARF 2018 PORTO**

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## Public Knowledge and Perceptions on Family Foster Care: Contributes to the Development of Foster Care in Portugal

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Thursday, 4th October @ 12:00: Foster Care System Needs (Venue: Ribeira I)

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Family foster care is a common child protection measure in Europe. Research in the last decades underlines its adjustment to children's needs of a family environment, relational proximity and developmental stimuli. However, in Portugal, only 3.2% of looked after children are included in family foster care, whilst the large majority remains in residential care facilities (ISS, 2016). In 2015, an alteration of the Portuguese child protection law made clear the preference for family foster care, especially when placing children under six years old in out of home care (Decreto- Lei 142/2015, artigo 46º). However, this legislative alteration calls for profound transformations in the way to promote and develop this measure, still very fragile in terms of awareness campaigns, recruitment, selection, training and monitoring of families (Delgado, Lopez, Carvalho & Del Valle, 2015).

Beyond many complex political, legislative and financial factors, the ability to promote family foster care may also depend on the knowledge and perceptions on this matter from the public. The main goal of this study was to analyze public knowledge and perceptions of family foster care of Portuguese citizens. More specifically the present study aimed to: (a) describe the knowledge about foster care measures, (b) capture the perception of positive effects and risks of family foster care, (c) describe perceived motivations, conditions and obstacles to family foster care, (d) know the (un)availability to become foster family and the reasons why (not).

270 Portuguese citizens, from 18 to 65 years old, answered the Perceptions of Foster Care Questionnaire (Negrão, Veiga, Verissimo & Moreira, 2017).

Main results show little public knowledge of foster care reality, but a favorable attitude towards family foster care and high availability to foster a child. Results also reveal the importance of relations as a main factor to ponder when deciding about family foster care: the importance of relational and affective qualities of families who foster, the added value of the development of healthy family relations in foster families (against residential care), but also the concern of the later relational disruptions as justifications of those who prefer residential care as a response to child endangerment. Lastly, results put in evidence some themes that fracture public opinion, as the importance of the financial retribution for the fostering services, or the importance of the contact between foster families and biological families.

Although not conducted with a representative sample, this study is, to our knowledge, the only that reports public perceptions of family foster care in Portugal. Thus, it can produce valuable insights in terms of awareness raising about conditions needed to expand family foster care in Portugal. Discussion will emphasize these implications of results towards the development of the family foster care measure in Portugal.