## Social workers’ practices in Kinship care

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## Key words: family foster care, child protection, social work.

Topics of the conference : Family foster care and Adoption

**Context.**

Cross-national comparisons of the main trends in child protection noted that in France there are fewer children who are fostered by family or friends than in most other countries. In France, most of kinship carers are members of the extended family. The relatives close to the biological parents are designated by the judge as “tiers digne de confiance” (trusted third party) and are in charge of the child custody. Based on a study founded by the National Observatory of Child Protection, this paper examines social workers’ practices in cases of kinship care in the North area (Département du Nord 59).

**Aim**

As the judges explained, their decisions are mainly based on the file prepared by social workers: they inform the judge of the story case and of the assessment of the child needs. So the social workers introduce the family. They also attend to the hearing with parent(s), potential Kinship Carer and the child. In this presentation, we wonder if Social workers’ practices may influence the low level of kinship care in France?

**Method.**

The fieldwork has been curried out in a non-profit association that provides home-based up-bringing assistance at the request of the judge (*Assistance éducative en milieu ouvert: AEMO*). With the help of the agency leaders, we considered all the cases supported by the association. From June 2014 to June 2015, we found 30 cases of kinship care. They were formal (carer named by the judge) or informal (friendly agreement between parent(s) and carer(s)) kinship care. In each situation, we did an in-depth interview with the social worker. 23 social workers following the 30 families exposed the case, the kinship care decision process and the social worker's practices with the family. After a first data analysis, we came back to social workers to summit our first results during a restitution workshop.

**Results and outcomes.**

Kinship carers' features inform us about what kind of family the social workers are researching. Social workers prefer to foster the child in a family that had previously no story with social services.

The family resources’ assessment illustrates social workers’ practices: economic resources are not systematically reported, neither carers’ social supports. The conditions to access to allowance are not well known.

Social workers and their managers share ambiguous feelings on the carers. The carer(s) must stay under control: playing a parental role with a great involvement in the day-to-day life, but without taking the parents’ place. In France, there is still a main trend of family reunification, and the difficulty to consider the role of all significant adults around the child. So social workers consider that kinship care present a greater risk (than professional foster family) to compete with parents and specially with the child’s mother.

**Conclusion.**

Our study was highlighted that social workers’ knowledge on this topic is less up-to-date than those on out-of-home care. We also notice the unexplored resources of the wider families and the fear of a “too important” carer’s involvement.

Even if kinship care is registered for a long time in French law as the first possibility that must be explored, these points may probably explain the less recourse to this possibility.

## References

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