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MOTIVATIONS, EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS OF FOSTER PARENTS
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Motivations, Experiences and Needs of Foster Parents in Turkey

Türkiye'deki Koruyucu Ailelerin Motivasyonları, Deneyimleri ve İhtiyaçları

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ABSTRACT

Foster families take place in the heart of the child welfare system, as they provide a home with the warmness of a family setting to children who stay in the institutions for various reasons. However, same as in other countries, in Turkey, the present number of foster families is much less than the demand of children who need family homes, requiring for an increase in the number of foster families. For this reason, there is a need to understand the main reasons that attract people in Turkey to foster care and what they experience after they become a foster family. As much as a rewarding experience it may be, being a foster family may involve difficulties as well, and foster families need to be provided various types of supports to continue to foster smoothly. There is limited research in Turkey that explore foster parents' reasons to be involved in foster care, their perspectives on foster care, and personal experiences. This qualitative study intends to contribute to filling the gap in the literature by increasing understanding of the motivations, rewarding and challenging experiences, and support needs of foster parents in Turkey. With this aim, in-depth interviews were conducted in Istanbul, Turkey with six foster mother and father dyads, who had at least one biological child. For each family, parents were interviewed together to understand their joint experience as a foster parent and observe their interactions as a couple. From the systemic perspective, any changes in the relationships of family subsystems after becoming a foster family were also examined. Data was analyzed with Thematic Analysis method, which revealed seven main themes: Motivations; The Process of Bonding with the Child; Difficulties of Being a Foster Family; Coping with the Difficulties; Transformation; Anxiety Related to the Child's Future; and Relationship with the System. Clinical implications are presented for clinicians, policy implications are discussed related to the foster care system in Turkey, and suggestions are made for future research.

Keywords: foster family, foster parent, foster care in Turkey, foster child, thematic analysis

ÖZET

Koruyucu aileler, çeşitli nedenlerle kurum bakımında kalan çocuklara aile ortamının sıcaklığı içerisinde bir ev sağladıkları için, çocuk koruma sisteminin kalbinde yer almaktadırlar. Bununla birlikte, diğer ülkelerde olduğu gibi, Türkiye'de de mevcut koruyucu aile sayısı, aile ortamında bir eve ihtiyaç duyan çocukların sayısından çok daha azdır ve bu da koruyucu aile sayısında artış olması gerektiğini göstermektedir. Bu yüzden, Türkiye'de aileleri koruyucu aile olmaya yönelten belli başlı sebeplerin neler olduğunun ve koruyucu aile olduktan sonra ne gibi deneyimler yaşadıklarının anlaşılmasına ihtiyaç vardır. Koruyucu aile olmak ödüllendirici bir deneyim olabildiği kadar, bazı zorlukları da içerebilmektedir ve koruyucu ailelerin sorunsuz bir şekilde bu hizmete devam edebilmeleri için onlara çeşitli desteklerin sağlanmasına ihtiyaç vardır. Türkiye'de koruyucu ebeveynlerin koruyucu aile sistemine dahil olma sebeplerini, koruyucu ailelikle ilgili bakış açılarını ve yaşadıkları kişisel deneyimlerini araştıran, bu konuda yapılmış çalışmalar sınırlıdır. Bu kalitatif çalışma, Türkiye'deki koruyucu ebeveynlerin koruyucu aile olma motivasyonlarını, ödüllendirici ve zorlayıcı deneyimlerini ve destek ihtiyaçlarını daha iyi anlamayı sağlayarak literatürdeki bu açığın giderilmesine katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla, İstanbul'da yaşayan, en az bir biyolojik çocuğu olan altı koruyucu ailede, anne ve babalarla derinliğine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Koruyucu ebeveyn olarak ortak deneyimlerini ve çift olarak etkileşimlerini gözlemlemek için her ailede anne ve baba ile birlikte görüşülmüştür. Sistemik perspektif ile, koruyucu aile olduktan sonra aile alt sistemlerindeki ilişkilerde meydana gelen değişimler de incelenmiştir. Veriler tematik analiz metodu ile analiz edilmiş ve sonuç olarak yedi ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır: Motivasyonlar; Çocuğa Bağlanma Süreci; Koruyucu Aile Olmanın Zorlukları; Zorluklarla Baş etme; Dönüşüm; Çocuğun Geleceğine İlişkin Kaygı; Sistemle İlişki. Klinisyenler için öneriler sunulmuş, Türkiye'deki koruyucu aile sistemi ile ilişkili öneriler açıklanmış ve gelecekteki araştırmalar için de bazı önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: koruyucu aile, koruyucu ebeveyn, Türkiye'de koruyucu aile hizmeti, koruyucu aile bakımındaki çocuk, tematik analiz

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Foster care is an arrangement in the child welfare system in which children are provided care by approved caregivers in a family home, since they cannot stay with their biological parents for different reasons. In terms of the length of service, foster care can be for short-term, long-term or permanent (http://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk).There are different types of foster care worldwide. These are "kinship foster care", "respite care", "urgent foster care" (emergency placements), "specialized medical foster care", "intensive/therapeutic foster care", "transitional foster care", etc. (http://www.families4kids.org)

Foster care is different from adoption. In foster care, foster parents care for and share the responsibility of the child with the state but birth parents still maintain the parental rights to their child. In the term of foster care, it is possible that the child is taken away from foster parents and placed to another foster home or returns to biological parents. Differently, in adoption, legal rights and responsibilities for the child are transferred from birth parents to adoptive parents by the decision of court, and these new parents assume the custody of the child, so that the child stays with his/her adoptive parents permanently.

Foster parents are the people in the heart of foster care service, since they are the ones who open their homes to children who are mostly disturbed because of unmet needs, neglect and abuse. These children are provided with their physical and emotional needs, by the support of caring and loving parents in a foster home, where they may have a chance to repair their past hurts. In this regard, foster parents' role has utmost importance in taking good care of these children.

Unfortunately, while the demand of children who need foster care is increasing, there is a shortage of families who can provide foster care (Baum et al., 2001; MacGregor et al., 2006). The number of children in the foster care system is increasing more rapidly than the number of foster families (Rodger et al., 2006). Moreover, with

an increase in the number of children in need, there has been a decrease in the number of foster families able to provide care (Daniel, 2011). In addition to the inadequacy of foster families, many families leave from foster care in their first year, which makes the situation worse (Rhodes et al., 2003).

Motivations or reasons for becoming foster parents have been researched in studies worldwide. Motivations of foster parents have been examined because of the need to better understand what attracts people to foster care. It is important that there is a good fit between initial motivations and the actual experience of foster parenting. What people hear and observe about foster care from outside may not be the same as living in it. If caregivers think and feel that motivational factors that made them to apply as foster parents are close to the experience after the placement of the foster child, then they would probably have more satisfaction from their role and want to continue providing care (Rodger et al., 2006).

Local authorities make decisions for applicants whether to approve them as foster care providers. They want to accept right candidates whose motivations match with the welfare of children. After children are placed with selected families, the challenging task of meeting the various needs of the children is necessary. Families who are willing and able to provide these needs are likely to continue, and those who cannot succeed are likely to have placement disruptions. In this view, retention of current foster parents seems closely related to selecting the right potential caregivers whose motivations fit with the needs of foster children. Thus, that gives us another reason to explore the motivations of foster parents. Motivations of caregivers are also researched because of the expectation that other people will apply to become foster parents with similar reasons. If widely seen reasons for starting foster care can be identified among caregivers, then there may be other potential foster parents waiting to give care with the motivations akin to those of current providers. So, examining, understanding, and having knowledge of fostering motivations has an important role in efforts of both keeping current foster parents and recruiting new foster caregivers (MacGregor et al., 2006; Rodger et al., 2006). Knowing people's motivations to foster makes it possible

to utilize the right messages in campaigns for reaching and attracting new candidates to the child welfare system, such as inviting them for creating a difference in the lives of children (Buehler et al., 2003; MacGregor et al., 2006), "helping children" or "giving children a chance to succeed in life" (Barbell & Sheikh, 2000, p. 18).

In addition to the need for researching the motivations of foster parents, it is important to know what these people experience after they start fostering. When the actual experience of fostering is like what foster parents have expected, then the parents are satisfied with their roles and want to continue fostering, but when the reality does not match with their expectations, then they are challenged in their roles and question their decision of starting foster care (Broady et al., 2010).

Besides seeing rewarding sides of foster care, caregivers may also face some difficult aspects of it (Buehler et al., 2003; Daniel, 2011; Rosenwald & Bronstein, 2008; Wilson et al., 2000). When foster parents feel challenged in their roles more than they can handle, and cannot receive the necessary supports, then they would consider discontinuing to foster (Brown & Bednar, 2006).

Foster parents need to be provided financial supports, emotional supports, and practical supports such as training and respite care. Receiving the necessary supports has a positive effect on the retention of foster parents (Daniel, 2011; MacGregor et al., 2006). Moreover, being informed about the kinds of supports involved may lessen the hesitations of potential foster parents in the decision of joining the pool of caregivers.

The kind of supports that help the parents to foster more smoothly can be identified and these must be continued to be provided. In addition, any supports lacking but are useful and important for the parents must be recognized and included in the support system.

1.1. MOTIVATIONS OF FOSTER PARENTS

According to the Self-Determination Theory, motivations are defined as intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation, depending on a person's different reasons for behaving in one direction or the goals s/he wants to attain (Deci & Ryan, 1985,

cited in Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 55). A person has intrinsic motivation when s/he does something out of a desire that comes within him/her inherently, without expecting another outcome other than the enjoyment or satisfaction felt from doing the activity. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, takes place when someone acts because of an expectation of a separate outcome, such as an external reward or to avoid an undesired consequence.

For example, when people want to foster because of altruistic reasons, such as wanting to save children from harm or improve their living conditions, considering their welfare as important, then these people could be thought as deciding to foster out of intrinsic motivations. On the other hand, when people think about fostering because of wanting to supplement family income by means of payments provided to foster families, then this would mean that they consider fostering based on an extrinsic motivation.

Results of the studies indicate that altruistic motivations which place children's well-being in the center of one's reasons to act as a foster caretaker, are prominent in the literature. One of these altruistic motivations is related to the awareness of the needs of many children in the community and subsequently the willingness to help these children (Baum et al., 2001; Daniel, 2011; MacGregor et al., 2006; Rhodes et al., 2006; Tyebjee, 2003) or the desire to rescue children from being hurt (Rodger et al., 2006). People also foster because of "wanting to make a difference in the lives of children/in a child's life" (MacGregor et al., 2006, p. 358; Tyebjee, 2003, p. 701). Another closely related motivation is wanting to give children a safe home and keep them away from having to be placed in an institution (De Maeyer et al., 2014; Rhodes et al., 2006). Loving children (Daniel, 2011; MacGregor et al., 2006), wanting to give them love (De Maeyer et al., 2014; Rhodes et al., 2006; Rodger et al., 2006), and wanting to provide children with good experiences in a family (Tyebjee, 2003; Wilson et al., 2007) are other reasons related to altruism.

Other motivations for fostering are related to change in family dynamics. The desire to parent children (Tyebjee, 2003), being unable to have biological children

(Andersson, 2001; Baum et al., 2001; Rhodes et al., 2006; Tyebjee, 2003), wanting to care for a relative child (Andersson, 2001; Baum et al, 2001; MacGregor et al., 2006), and the desire to expand the family (Rhodes et al., 2006) are some of these motivations. Some people consider the benefits to their own child of having a foster sibling, such as providing a company for the child (Andersson, 2001; Baum et al., 2001; Wilson et al., 2007), gaining experience of sharing home with other children (MacGregor et al., 2006) or inhibiting him/her from getting excessive attention as an only child (Wilson et al., 2007). Some parents want to foster because their grown-up children have moved but they still desire to see children around (Andersson, 2001; MacGregor et al., 2006; Rhodes et al., 2006). Other parents consider fostering as a step before adoption (Baum et al., 2001; MacGregor et al., 2006; Rhodes et al., 2006).

Some motivations can be related to present conditions at home or work. For example, foster mothers may prefer to look after foster children with their own children at home rather than working at an undesirable job outside (Andersson, 2001). Some may want to take in foster children because they think they have available time and enough space at home (Baum et al., 2001). Other people may think about fostering because it matches well with their new career plans (Wilson et al., 2007).

Some people foster because they want to provide a benefit to their community or society (De Maeyer et al., 2014; Rhodes et al., 2006). Motivations to foster also can be rooted in feeling responsible to help others because of religious reasons (Baum et al., 2001; De Maeyer et al., 2014; Tyebjee, 2003). Other motivations are focused on the self, such as "need to be needed/needing to be needed by children" (Daniel, 2011, p. 914; MacGregor et al., 2006, p. 358;) and wanting to have a more meaningful life (Tyebjee, 2003).

Other foster parents also play an important role for the awareness of foster care and the influence of motivation to be a foster caregiver. A telephone survey study conducted with 1,011 people in California found that respondents who met other parents with fostering or adopting experience, were likely to have a more favorable attitude toward both foster care and adoption (Tyebjee, 2003). Having parents who

were foster caregivers, desire of the spouse to foster, support of the spouse/biological children, being a foster child in the past (Baum et al., 2001), knowing other foster caregivers who have good experiences of fostering, and knowing specific children who need help (Baum et al., 2001; De Maeyer et al., 2014) were all effective factors on deciding to be a foster parent.

Kirton (2001) inquired about the effect of payments on foster mothers' motivation and performance of fostering. Payment was found to be important for some caregivers, especially for those who needed to work and depended on fostering income. It was also perceived as a compensation for dealing with some difficult parts of fostering. Nonetheless, the effect of financial compensation on caregivers was limited. It was not a primary motivation for foster parents to begin or continue foster care. This was related to the intrinsic rewards involved and the commitment needed in foster care.

The research studies about motivations that are referred to above, were conducted in Belgium, Canada, England, Sweden, and U.S. In all these studies, income generation as an extrinsic motivation does not take place in the main reasons to start foster care.

One study differs from other studies in its viewpoint of assessing foster parents' motivations (Doyle & Melville, 2013). In this study, in depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 foster parents who were registered with a main child welfare agency in Australia. Their motives and attitudes related to fostering were analyzed from C. Wright Mills' sociological perspective, in which motives are examined in their cultural and social context.

In the same study, these foster parents said that they had altruistic reasons that focused on children's needs, when they decided to foster. They did not state that they were motivated by economic reasons to start foster care, but detailed examination of their explanations suggested that financial motives were also in place for many foster parents. First, most foster parents thought that carers should receive payment for fostering. Second, these parents were receiving a good amount of allowance for foster care, and many of them supported the idea of a higher amount of allowance or being

paid a wage. Third, they had learned about the foster parent positions through an advertisement placed by the child welfare agency in the employment section of newspapers. In addition, many carers referred to matters relating to work or occupation when they were explaining how they started fostering. For these reasons, the study concluded that although economic factors were important for many foster carers, they did not include these factors in the context of their talks about motives to foster. The authors argued that it was very likely that these carers did not want to risk ruining their caregiving reputation by mentioning monetary reasons, since they knew that foster parents were expected by the society and child protection institutions to care for children voluntarily with altruistic reasons (Doyle & Melville, 2013).That characteristic of foster care mainly seen as a voluntary act out of altruism without any other expectation and on the other hand the reality of payments needed as a compensation for taking care of a foster child and in this regard foster care more seen as a profession, seems as two different point of views.

Isomaki (2002) points out that because foster caregivers receive pre-service training, gain experience in a specific practice of child care, and are involved with other responsible parties in the child welfare system during the term of foster care, foster parenting could be thought of as "a profession and a career" (Isomaki, 2002, p. 628). Furthermore, the author argues that many children come to foster care with physical, emotional or behavioral difficulties, and this aspect of the need for a specialized care for these children renders fostering as a professional care model as well.

Isomaki informs us that in Finland when the regulations of foster care were established by the state, discussions were made about providing a remuneration for fostering, because of the concerns of attracting to the system those people with mostly economic motives, rather than those who focused on the welfare of children. But on the other part of the equation is the reality of the need to be compensated for taking care of a foster child. So, despite these concerns, practically the necessity of remuneration in being able to provide foster care for those people who were not affluent was realized.

Isomaki argues that the motive to foster would be rarely expected to be either one way or the other, namely, either involving altruistic reasons (e.g. love of or wanting to help children) or increasing income, but in general rather the presence of both reasons to various degrees of weight for different foster parents. In addition, the author adds more complexity to his argument by stating that the motives are not stable, and over time of fostering experience, the motive of a foster parent could shift from one point to another point somewhere along the line of altruism at one end, and consideration of money at the other end. Even in some cases of foster parents entering foster care with altruistic motives at all, without considering compensation, their motives could change moderately over time. For example, after starting foster care, a foster family might begin to live financial difficulties or find it challenging to get along with the foster child, and then the family might perceive the value of compensation from a more practical view than they had recognized before fostering.

Isomaki emphasizes that when a family becomes a candidate for fostering, looking at the relation between their fostering motive and economic level would possibly predict that family's success in fostering, based on a previous research of examining the same factor for experienced foster parents. For example, a family with good economic resources and altruistic motives would be an ideal candidate, whereas a family who has a low or middle income and mostly economic reasons rather than altruistic reasons would not possibly be a good candidate for fostering.

So, one can think that there is a fine line of distinction between economic reasons being a source of motivation to foster and the necessity of compensation in meeting expenses and providing quality foster care. For example, Wilson et al. (2007) found that fostering allowances given by an independent agency in south-east England resulted in higher household incomes and made it possible for some of the foster fathers either to lessen their work hours outside or leave their jobs and start as full-time foster caregivers. By having allowances, the foster fathers could make a career change either in part or entirely and as a result were able to spend more time with their own and foster children.

In a quantitative study conducted in U.S., researchers found that after receiving foster care training, families who had more income were more likely to take a further step to begin providing care. Moreover, those having incomes below the average were very likely to leave either before or after finishing the application process to become foster parents, indicating the need of supplying these families with adequate resources to be able to foster (Rhodes et al., 2003). In a qualitative study conducted in Canada, foster parents stated that to provide good foster care, they needed adequate payments for the expenses made for foster children (Brown & Calder, 2000). In another Canadian study, questionnaires filled by foster parents revealed that 70% of respondents stated their need for more payments to keep doing well in fostering (Hudson & Levasseur, 2002).

After a family starts fostering a child, it's important that they maintain their initial motivations or develop new motivations to be able to continue caring for the child, because of the difficulties and stress associated with fostering. The motivations to start foster care could be at the same time perceived as rewards of fostering in the meantime by foster caregivers when the desired effects on foster children are realized, for example when parents succeed to help a child or create a change in that child's life (MacGregor et al., 2006). If foster parents benefit from the rewards of fostering, they can feel stronger in dealing with the difficult aspects of fostering. Putting effort as foster parents and consecutively seeing positive changes in children would alleviate the stresses relating to fostering (Buehler et al., 2003).

Buehler et al. (2003) conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 foster parents from Tennessee, U.S. These foster parents shared their experiences and explained what they perceived as rewards of fostering. Most common rewards of fostering were "seeing a child grow and develop" and "making a difference in a child's life" (Buehler et al., 2003, p. 66). Keeping children away from undesired conditions, providing them with positive life experiences, and instilling hope were rewarding for these parents. Another reward was seeing children have a normal life in safety and feel

that they belonged to a family. Loving a child and being loved by a child were also perceived as rewards of fostering.

In Canada, Daniel (2011) conducted a qualitative exploratory study with eight participants who had at least five years of fostering experience. The foster parents stated that they were motivated by altruistic reasons to care for their foster children. Besides these reasons, there were other factors that sustained them in their parenting roles. The foster parents mentioned their feelings of pleasure and satisfaction associated with seeing the children grow and progress both physically and mentally and become happy in their safe homes. Contributing to the children's development and having positive outcomes made these foster parents feel satisfied. They also indicated that having foster children at home was beneficial as a self-development experience for both themselves and the other family members, adding that these children enhanced their life. Having positive experiences and being satisfied affected them to stay motivated and continue as foster parents (Daniel, 2011).

Focus groups conducted with thirteen foster parents in New York revealed that although these foster parents were aware of the challenging aspects of fostering, because of their desire to help children, they found internal rewards in their roles and were committed to fostering (Rosenwald & Bronstein, 2008). One of the factors relating to the success of foster placements is the harmony between the types of motivations foster families have and meeting the needs of foster children. Foster parents with intrinsic motivations such as having social concern for their society or rescuing children from undesired conditions seem more likely to continue to foster (Rodger et al., 2006).

Some studies have looked at the relationship between specific motivations and the outcome. For example, a survey study conducted with 876 foster families in nine states of U.S., examined the relationship between fostering motivations and the service foster families provided (Rhodes et al., 2006). The study inquired if the motivations were linked to kind and duration of fostering service and the number of children fostered.

Parents who had the motivation of preventing children from being placed in an institution, had been fostering for a longer time and a license to foster a higher number of children than parents who did not have this motivation. Parents with grown up biological children and the desire to have younger children around, had more foster children placed with them, a license to foster a higher number of children, and a higher possibility of continuing to provide foster care than parents who did not have this motivation. (Rhodes et al., 2006).

On the other hand, parents who had the motivations of desiring a company for themselves or for their biological child; wanting to receive love from a child; and those not being married but willing to have a child, fostered less children than parents who did not have these motivations. Parents who perceived fostering as a step before adoption had less children placed with them than parents who did not have this reason (Rhodes et al., 2006).

While the study mentioned above explored the relation of fostering reasons to providing a longer time of service, more variety of special care and fostering more children, another study examined the relation between foster parents' reasons for starting foster care and their attachment relationship with the infants they cared (Cole, 2005). Cole found that foster parents who had the motivations of enlarging their family and having social concern for their own community, had a secure attachment relationship with the infants they cared. On the other hand, foster parents who had the motivations of conveying their spirituality, wanting to adopt, and replacing grown-up children by taking in the foster infant, had an insecure attachment relationship with the infants they cared.

These two studies have investigated the relation of motivations to outcome in foster care based on foster parents' performance or relationships with their foster children. There are also some other studies that have examined success in foster care directly from foster parents' point of view. Their perspectives of the factors associated with success were related to their motivations, characteristics either as foster parents or more widely as a foster family, and effects on foster children.

1.2. WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO SUCCESS IN FOSTERING?

A "deep concern or love for children" (Buehler et al., 2003, p. 72) was one of the most frequently mentioned factors by foster parents to be successful in foster care. Having faith and affiliation with the church, both as a motivational and a supporting factor for providing foster care, was found to be a strong characteristic associated with successful fostering. Either based on religious reasons or not, considering the needs and focusing on the welfare of children were important for these foster parents and they felt successful when they were able to fulfill their values relating to caring for children (Buehler et al., 2003).

In the same study, being patient, having an open-mind, showing an understanding towards children's differences, and providing support for their emotional problems were stated as other important factors for successful fostering. A strong marital relationship in which partners have open communication, support each other, and both are committed to fostering, was considered important, too. Foster parents believed that an "organized" and "structured" (Buehler et al., 2003, p. 72) family life with daily routines; clearly defined and consistent guidelines and responsibilities for children, but at the same time leaving some flexibility for the needs of children; and having expectations from fostering or the child that are close to reality, contributed to successful fostering (Buehler et al., 2003).

Another study found that foster caregivers who were not very strict in providing limits, leaving some flexibility for foster children, had the children more likely to stay longer with them. In contrary, foster caregivers who set stiff rules for foster children, were more likely to have breakdowns in placements of the children in their care (Crum, 2010).

Motives that did not focus on foster children's needs, such as increasing income or providing a company for biological children, were considered by foster parents as an inhibiting factor for successful fostering. Foster parents also thought that being too busy with other responsibilities of life interfered with success in foster care. Lacking

good communication skills in stressful situations was also found to be an inhibitor for successful fostering (Buehler et al., 2003).

Telephone interviews were done with sixty-one foster parents in Canada (Brown & Campbell, 2007). They were asked what factors constituted success in foster placements. A safe and secure home whereby foster parents are attentive to physical and psychological needs of foster children, was perceived as indicating a successful placement. A secure relationship between the foster family and foster children, a caring attitude by all members of the foster family who accept these children as part of the family and are empathic towards what the children have lived through, were emphasized as other factors of success. Having positive contacts with the child's biological parents and extended family was also regarded as an important indicator of success, and that was related to the foster parents' perception of the child's return to birth parents as a positive outcome. After a new member has joined the foster family, if the family members accept that child's differences, support each other in their roles, and make necessary adjustments, then positive changes happen in all the family, indicating successful fostering (Brown & Campbell, 2007).

Foster families, whose characteristics fit with the needs of the foster child about whom they have adequate information, and continuous practical and emotional support from foster care agencies before and after the child has been placed with the foster family, were regarded as other factors of success in foster care (Brown & Campbell, 2007).

In the same study, foster parents related both the imminent and future positive effects on the foster children to the success of a placement. The foster children feeling loved and important, adapting and developing a sense of belonging to their new family with whom they have a mutually trusting relationship, were perceived as positive effects on the children. Other positive effects were regarded as the children improving physically, becoming happier, having good behaviors and doing well in their relationships with social contacts. Moreover, when the children developed a positive personality, learned family values and their culture, prepared for life, made

contributions to the community and became successful, then foster parents knew that these "make a difference in child's life" (Brown & Campbell, 2007, p. 1018) and then would feel successful themselves as well.

In literature, the goal of a foster placement is frequently indicated as either the child's permanent stay in the foster home/adoption or the child's return to his/her biological parents (Hudson & Levasseur, 2002; Isomaki, 2002; Redding et al., 2000), but differently in this study, a strong and ongoing relationship between foster family and biological parents for the well-being of the foster child was considered as success (Brown & Campbell, 2007). Foster parents not only naturally accepted biological parents' contacts with the foster child, but also perceived their own relationship with the biological parents as important and wanted to be in touch with them. Foster parents also regarded their relationship with foster children as to be for a long term and wanted to contact them even after they returned to their biological families (Brown & Campbell, 2007).

1.3. DIFFICULTIES OF FOSTER CARE

Besides positive experiences of fostering, difficult or challenging aspects are involved in foster care as well. Buehler et al. (2003) found that taking care of children's problems regarding their behaviors and emotions was the most frequently mentioned stress factor by foster parents. These foster parents also thought that dealing with the agency or workers was stressful. The stress was related to the formalities of the child welfare system or its unresponsiveness to their needs, and not receiving adequate support from the agency/workers. Foster parents also found it stressful to take care of a few foster children at the same time who were younger than age six.

Foster parents were disappointed about not being provided adequate information about the past of the foster children in their care or not being involved in the decisions taken about the children by caseworkers. Although these foster parents felt this way, they expressed an understanding for the caseworkers of allocating limited

time for each child because of their burden of having a lot of cases (Rosenwald & Bronstein, 2008).

The other challenges were: not receiving respite care as a break from fostering; and not having assistance on time from the agencies when they had a difficult time with their foster children (Daniel, 2011). These foster parents were also annoyed that the agencies were not giving adequate information about the foster children in their care. They had negative feelings about not being fairly included in the decisions taken for the foster child, when other parties such as agencies and biological parents had much to say. Another challenge they faced was dealing with people's opinions about their foster parent role, such as having to make explanations to some people who regarded them as if they separated foster children from their birth families.

Foster parents thought that there were some barriers that discouraged people to become foster parents. These barriers were: not being paid a remuneration for the fostering service (if foster parents are paid a remuneration, they will receive a higher amount of money); having to meet strict requirements and the commitment involved for becoming a foster carer; fears of accusations of not taking care of the foster child properly; and being afraid of having to face the separation from the foster child when the time comes to leave (Daniel, 2011).

Mailed questionnaires were filled by 950 foster caregivers in England (Wilson et al., 2000). Although in general these foster families were satisfied with the experience of providing foster care, there were some specific aspects of it that created distress for them. These difficulties were: the displacement of foster children before planned time due to their unmanageable acts or their removal from foster homes despite the unwillingness of foster parents; foster parents' opinions seen as not important by social workers or disagreements with them on the decisions taken for the children; strains of dealing with problem behaviors of the children and negative effects on the behavior of own children or on the relationship with the spouse after taking home foster children; hostility or violent behavior of foster children's birth parents towards foster parents; and physical or sexual abuse allegations imposed on foster families.

These experiences can badly affect foster parents' self-image as a competent caregiver, ruin their perception of receiving positive supports from social workers, and cause stressful interactions between foster parents and their family members. A more stressful home may cause to lessen their parenting abilities, possibly generating more incidents, and these incidents produce more stress (Wilson et al., 2000).

In a Canadian qualitative study by Brown and Bednar (2006), foster parents stated that they would consider discontinuing to foster a child in their care, if they faced adverse events or conditions while fostering. For example, disobedience to rules, or more seriously violent or delinquent behavior of the foster child that causes harm to foster family were some of the reasons for not to continue fostering. If the child was not able to adjust to his/her new home, and foster parents were not able to handle the child's problems, foster parents would think that they could not meet the child's complicated needs, feel that they could not do well in their parenting roles and in this case, they would consider leaving fostering. If the child desired to return to his/her biological parents, foster parents again would consider discontinuing to foster that child (Brown & Bednar, 2006).

According to the results of the same study, negative relations with the agency or social workers such as not receiving help from them, not being regarded as important, disagreements or not being part of the decisions about the child, being accused by social workers, and having to deal with the policies of the child welfare system could also result in foster parents leaving fostering. They could end fostering if they believed that the child was not benefiting from staying in their home after they have tried several ways of solving problems they had faced while fostering. Personal changes for foster parents such as a job change, getting older, health issues, and moving to another place could also cause them to end fostering. Getting too tired or stressful, and negative effects on their own children because of fostering, would make them consider quitting (Brown & Bednar, 2006).

Foster parents need the help of other parties in the child welfare system. Not receiving support from the child's biological parents or educational institutions the

child is attending; and not being supported economically would make them again consider discontinuing to foster (Brown & Bednar, 2006).

1.4. ADJUSTMENT AND COPING

Families deal with the challenges of life with "family resilience as a process that develops over time" (Lietz et al., 2016, p. 661). Through this process, families defeat any negative impacts to the family system and maintain the family's healthy functioning. As a family begins fostering, the family must overcome the difficulties involved and adapt to the changes that happen during times of transitions such as accepting foster children home, adopting foster children or leaving from foster children. Foster families who are resilient go through five stages of ongoing "coping and adaptation" whereby they employ various "family strengths" in each stage (Lietz et al., 2016, p. 664).

When a family starts foster care, they try to cope with this considerable change to the family unit (Lietz et al., 2016). They "survive" through this first stage with a cohesion among family members whereby they understand and help each other; receive support from their friends, neighbors, agency workers and other foster families; and believe in shared moral or spiritual values. In the second stage, families start to "adjust" to the changes in their daily life as well as to the new structure of the family. At this point, they develop other strengths as they become more planned and active in providing care; form boundaries between fostering and the family both in practical ways and emotionally; and find new ways of dealing with the troubles they may face. In the third stage, families become aware of the parts of fostering that they need to "accept" as they are but at the same time know the aspects of fostering on which they can have effect. At this stage, while gaining a realistic insight about fostering, they are committed to providing foster care but still consider the family members' being united as important. Open communication among family members, informative interactions with the child welfare agency and ongoing contacts with biological parents make it easier to overcome difficulties and to adapt to foster care. Sometimes being carefree,

seeing the fun part and taking a humorous approach to events are other strengths for developing resilience. In the fourth stage, families "grow stronger" (Lietz et al., 2016, p. 669) out of difficulties and family members mutually regard fostering as a positive, valuable, and developing experience. In the last stage, families share their expertise and coach new foster families on challenges of providing foster care.

1.5. ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FOSTER CHILD

Foster parents play a crucial role for foster children before they go through a transition of reuniting with their biological parents whose circumstances have positively changed (Brown & Bednar, 2006). On the other hand, the child's stay at foster home for an indefinite period may be stressful for both the foster family and the foster child.

Although a real concern and loving children is needed for successful fostering, getting strongly attached to a foster child might complicate the process because of the temporary role of foster care. It could be difficult to overcome the frustration when foster parents are not willing to leave from the child and even desire to adopt him/her, whereas returning the child back to biological parents is permanently planned by the foster care agency (Buehler et al., 2003). When the child must leave, having to separate from the child and adapting to the new situation may be hard and cause feelings of loss for both (Daniel, 2011; Isomaki, 2002).

Even though foster caregivers acknowledge that the placement of foster children in their home is a temporary arrangement and their goal is to help the children's well-being by providing them with better living conditions, this is a cognitive conception of foster care by the caregivers in the beginning (Broady et al., 2010). By time, they may often grow a strong bond with the children in their care. In that case, they may face a dilemma between being aware that biological parents primarily have the parental rights to the children so that the children can be taken away from foster parents any time, and at the same time feeling strong love for the children and not wanting to leave from them. Thus, the attachment bond formed with the children can

make foster parenting more fulfilling, but at the same time may involve feelings of anger, frustration, and pain for caregivers in case of the finalization of a placement (Broady et al., 2010).

The ambiguity involved could bring additional stress to foster parents in their relationship with their foster children, especially when strong emotional investment is in place. Despite being strained, these parents must form a close relationship with the children, who might have difficulty to attach to their "new parents" because of not being able to hold on to stable figures in their lives. These children are separated from their own parents, and moreover they might have to move from one foster home to another, which would make the situation harder.

1.6. SUPPORTS NEEDED BY FOSTER PARENTS

Focus group studies were conducted with 54 foster parents in Ontario, Canada, with the aim of understanding their motivations, support needs, and how they would be able to continue fostering (MacGregor et al., 2006). These foster parents expected to have positive relationships with workers of the child welfare agencies and receive their "emotional support" (MacGregor et al., 2006, p. 358). The foster parents expressed their needs of being able to reach agency workers instantly and receive help when they were faced with a very challenging situation with their foster child. They also wanted the workers to communicate in a truthful manner. The foster parents also needed to be trusted by the workers in handling the foster children in their care and receive complete information about them. They desired better "recognition" by agency staff for their fostering capabilities with respect for their opinions, and wanted to take part in the decisions taken about the foster children (MacGregor et al., 2006).

Another type of support mentioned was the need of more services for foster children like having the necessary outfit, equipment, education, physical and psychological treatment. Some foster parents stated that payments they received was adequate, whereas others said that they needed better finances to provide for the needs of their foster children. Respite care was also an important type of support for these

parents since it provided them a break from fostering and a separate time with their biological children. Another type of support needed was training. Although almost all focus groups stated that they had had a very good foster training, they suggested that the training be more tailored to the individual needs of different children (MacGregor et al., 2006).

A qualitative study was conducted with 182 potential foster parents who received training to prepare for foster care in Iowa, U.S. (Baum et al., 2001). The study aimed to find out the influential factors on the parents' decision to foster or not to foster. According to the findings of the study, training did not affect the decision of fostering for most of potential foster parents (70.3%), since they had made their decision before they received training. However, some of these parents indicated that even though they had made their decision before training, training helped to strengthen and feel content with the decision. Training does not only provide the answers to the questions of what to experience as a foster parent but also helps candidates to feel competent for their parenting skills after the decision of caring for a child in need.

Foster parents stated that they would need support in a situation of claims made against them of improperly treating foster children, such as an accusation of abuse. They also pointed out that they wanted more resources for the medical and transportation needs of children (Rosenwald & Bronstein, 2008).

If the child has more severe problems of poor health and difficult behaviors to manage, it can get more challenging for the foster family to take care of the child, and thus the family may need increased training and emotional support to deal with these specific conditions, and financial support as well for the medical or psychotherapy expenses required for the child (Isomaki, 2002).

The support of other foster parents is important for people who are new at foster care (Daniel, 2011). Foster parents value the emotional support of other foster parents who empathize with them when they share their concerns and experiences relating to foster care (Rosenwald & Bronstein, 2008).

Other source of support is foster parents' own family. Foster parents feel stronger in their parenting skills when they see an understanding by their family members for their fostering endeavors (Buehler et al., 2003).

Foster parents suggested that new foster carers get adapted to their role gradually, for example by starting to foster temporarily as a respite carer and by not taking difficult cases such as teenagers and children who have challenging behaviors or special needs. Foster parents thought that retention of foster carers would be better if they were provided support for the aspects of fostering that they perceived as challenging (Daniel, 2011).

The focus group studies revealed that by having the supports needed; receiving precise information from the agency about the children fostered; not assigning children who are difficult to manage to new foster caregivers; and organizing a system that would bring foster caregivers together to support each other, foster parents would be likely to continue to foster (MacGregor et al., 2006).

Foster care involves all members of the foster family and each member is likely to affect the fostering decision and the foster child's experiences in the family to some degree. When research was done for the literature review of our study, it was realized that in many studies of foster parents' motivations and experiences, either the majority or all the participants were foster mothers. In contrary, a study stands as different in that all the participants were foster fathers, all of whom were either married or lived with a female partner (Wilson et al., 2007). The study was based on both quantitative and qualitative data and conducted with foster fathers in south-east England.

Even though their wives or partners were more active in considering foster care as the first one, a lot of these foster fathers were involved as well in the final decision to foster. Moreover, the foster fathers shared with their wives or partners most of the tasks regarding taking care of foster children. The foster fathers did not only spend quality time in a variety of activities with these children, but also took part in easing the children's emotional difficulties, helping them feel better, and instilling positive behaviors. In addition, the foster fathers perceived themselves as making specific

contributions to foster children's well-being, such as by talking to them in matters that could be better explained by men, and by representing "a positive male role model" (Wilson et al., 2007, p. 25) for children who had had negative experiences with their biological or step fathers.

1.7. THE EFFECTS OF FOSTER CARE ON THE FAMILY

Not only the foster child is affected by the new relationships formed in the foster family, but the change in family dynamics impacts other members in the family as well. A focus group and individual interviews conducted with twelve foster parents in Australia revealed that in many cases the actual experience of fostering a child did not fit with their expectations from foster care before they lived with the child (Broady et al., 2010). The foster parents had generally not either positive or negative experiences at all in providing foster care, but rather encountered both. For example, foster care could have a negative effect on the relationships of caregivers with their family by causing jealousy of their own children or creating strain on the communication with their spouses. On the other hand, having a foster child at home could also affect caregivers' biological children positively by helping them grow an understanding towards others and become mature (Broady et al., 2010).

In Sweden, a questionnaire survey was conducted with 366 foster mothers and fathers, and 17 married couples among those who were surveyed were also interviewed (Höjer, 2004). In this study, most of the couples thought that fostering either positively affected or had no effect on their relationship with their spouse, with a small percentage of participants stating a negative effect. Many fathers had taken a more active role in sharing with their spouse the tasks of caring for the children than they had done before fostering, and this change pleased their wives. Sharing the caring duties and talking about their feelings on issues related to foster parenting made couples feel closer to each other. As the negative side, some foster parents perceived foster care as much energy and time consuming, some fathers perceiving this as interfering with their marriage since their wives could spare less time for them. According to the same study,

fostering had a positive effect on the biological children, their parents stating that their children had gained an understanding towards others from different backgrounds, becoming more empathic and caring. But this also meant they were exposed to the dark side of life when they were too young, due to learning about the experiences of their foster siblings who had confronted violence and abuse of all kinds. Another negative effect of fostering on the biological children as seen by the parents was finding less time to take care of their needs, causing some parents to feel neglect and guilt.

In another study in U.S. (Younes & Harp, 2007), where ten foster parents and their biological children were interviewed, it was found that it was challenging for the foster parents to meet the needs of both their own and foster children and find enough time for their own children. It was also difficult for the biological children to share their house and parents with foster children, with getting less time and attention from their parents. Most of the biological children had feelings of anger, fear, stress, jealousy or felt unseen by their parents. They were observed by their parents to have positive changes in their characteristics, such as being more social, friendly, helpful, loving, caring or having more responsibility, but were also seen to have negative changes in their behaviors, such as being more stubborn, noncompliant, irritable or more introverted. The parents expected from their biological children to show good behaviors so that the foster children would model their behaviors, which was a burden for some of the biological children. Some children also did not like their position in the family being changed, due to losing their birth order after the foster child's coming to their home. Regarding changes on their relationships with their brothers and sisters, there were different responses among the children, some of them saying it continued the same, some of them seeing negative effects, and one stating a positive effect. Having more empathy for other children in need with different backgrounds and learning much more about life were seen other positive effects on the biological children. The negative side of this for them was becoming familiar with past traumatic experiences of foster children, although this made the children better understand the

value of their parents and home and how lucky they were, which was perceived as another positive effect.

1.8. FOSTER CARE SYSTEM AND RESEARCH IN TURKEY

In Turkey, legal requirements to become a foster parent are; being a Turkish citizen; having permanent residency in Turkey; being at any age between 25 and 65; holding at least a primary school degree; having a regular income; and not being the child's biological parents or guardian. There is no limitation for marital status or having children. People who are single or married, with or without biological children can apply to become a foster parent (http://www.koruyucuaile.gov.tr).

There are different models of foster care in Turkey. One of them is kinship foster care, in which children are fostered by their relatives or other people children know closely, such as caregivers who already look after the child or their neighbors. Another model is short-term foster care. If children need urgent placement in a foster home, if no service plan has been made yet for the children or the children have not yet started to benefit from the service model planned for them for some reason, then they will receive foster care for a short-term, which is for a few days up to a month at most. In a third model of foster care, children stay for a longer time at foster homes, in the case that they cannot return to their birth parents shortly or they cannot find a permanent placement with a family. The fourth model is specialized foster care, in which foster parents care for and help children who have special needs and difficulties (http://www.koruyucuaile.gov.tr).The most prevalent model is the third model, in which children stay with their foster families for a longer time (Baysal, 2017).

There are few research studies in Turkey that explore foster parents' views on foster care, motivations and personal experiences. Some of them are published studies in journals and some are master's dissertations. Some of the most recent ones are summarized below:

In a qualitative master's dissertation study, Ertürk (2020) conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 foster parents in Gebze, Kocaeli, in which %70 of

participants were women and %30 of participants were men. The purpose of the study was to determine why foster care service has not yet developed much in Turkey and to make suggestions to improve it. The deficiencies of foster care service, solutions for them, and what kind of studies could be done to make foster care service more widespread were presented in the study.

One recent master's dissertation study researched mainly the experiences of Turkish foster parents and their views on foster care, and examined the reasons to become a foster parent as well (Baysal, 2017). Baysal analyzed 225 survey questionnaires that were sent to a sample of foster mothers and fathers who lived in Istanbul and were mostly married, and most of whom had no child of their own, being either married or single. According to the survey results, the most frequent reason to become a foster parent was wanting to provide a child to grow up in a family setting. Not having any child of their own was the second, and loving children a lot was the third most frequent reasons. He also found that the foster parents lived or observed behavioral problems with their foster children. Some of these behaviors were: being very stubborn, quickly becoming angry, yelling and hitting, difficulty in communicating with the child in the adjustment period, being extremely active and attention problems, being overly dependent on the family with the fear of being left again, being naughty and not listening to parents, jealousy and fights with the siblings, refusing to follow the rules, not eating and being very picky on meals, among other behaviors.

In another qualitative master's dissertation study, Certel (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 foster parents (24 women and 2 men) who are a member of Foster Family Associations in Istanbul and Denizli, to understand their evaluations regarding the foster care system and the processes they lived as a foster parent. She found that the most difficult process for the foster parents was the adjustment period because of their foster children's emotional and behavioral problems and the relations with other parties in the foster care system. Another finding was that

the problems seen because of the lack of interaction among all parties in the system had a negative effect on the system.

Daşbaş (2015) conducted a qualitative study in Turkey with six families and their own children, and mainly examined the effect of fostering on foster families. She found that fostering was both a challenging and a rewarding experience, and it improved the biological children's living skills and made them more mature. For most of the biological children, fostering either did not affect their relationships with their parents or it was affected in a positive way. If the ages of the foster child and the biological child were close and they had the same gender, they had a more negative relationship. In this study, the motivations of the parents to start fostering were examined as well. The most frequent reason was to help a child who stayed in the institution or was in a difficult situation. The second reason was considering having more children, and the third reason was not wanting to stay alone after their children have grown up and left home, and some families were motivated by more than one of these reasons.

Bilican Gökkaya (2014) conducted a quantitative study on foster parents' reasons to start fostering in Sivas. The most frequent reasons were; wanting to help children in need and having no children, followed by wanting to have a daughter, have a son, and being lonely.

Özbesler (2009) examined and evaluated the problems foster parents lived with their foster children, who applied to a child clinic for psychological support. He highlighted the importance of professionally assessing both foster families and children before their placement with foster families and the need for follow-up with the aim of preventing the problems. He also suggested an educational program for preparing foster families before the children are placed with them.

Üstüner et al. (2005) researched in Ankara the problems of foster children regarding their emotions and behaviors, and compared these with the problems of children who stayed in residential care and children living with biological families, which were examined from the viewpoint of foster and biological parents, caretakers

in residential care, school workers and children. Results indicated that the children who stayed in residential care had the highest rate of problems, whereas the rate of problems in foster children and those living with biological families were close. Based on the findings, the need for more prevalence of foster care was highlighted.

1.9. THE PRESENT STUDY

Because of the disparity between the demand of children in need of care and the supply of families who are willing and able to provide fostering, more work is needed to bring in new caregivers to the child welfare system and at the same time to maintain current foster families to continue to provide foster care. Our study aims to be a part of these efforts by focusing on one country in which foster care system has yet to develop and expand: Turkey. As explained above, there are four models of foster care in Turkey, and this study was conducted with foster parents who provide foster care for a longer time, which is the third model.

The purpose of this study is to understand various motivations of foster parents in Turkey that bring them to foster care and how they experience being a foster parent. Compared to the international literature, in Turkey studies that explore foster parents' views on foster care, motivations or personal experiences are few (Baysal, 2017; Bilican Gökkaya, 2014; Certel, 2016; Daşbaş, 2015; Ertürk, 2020; Özbesler, 2009; Üstüner et al., 2005).

Our qualitative study intends to contribute to filling the gap in the literature by increasing understanding of the motivations, rewarding and challenging experiences, and support needs of these parents in Turkey who open their loving homes to children in need. We want to discover any difficulties these foster parents might face and the supports they may need while providing foster care. Although Turkish foster parents are supported by the Family and Social Policies Ministry and the local authorities, some support needs varying on an individual basis may also be present for these parents or additional supports may be needed. They must be heard for what they view as the strengths and deficits in the support system. A qualitative study can provide us with

information on how foster parents give meaning to their way of living in foster care. By having in-depth interviews with foster parents, we can discover their unique stories and valuable experiences.

In the present study, for each participant family, the mother and the father were interviewed together to understand their joint experience as a foster parent, and their interactions as a couple were observed and noted as well. From a systemic perspective, the present study also examined if there were any changes in couple relationships and in the relationships between the parents and their biological children after becoming a foster family. In these respects, the present study is uniquely different from other studies with foster parents in Turkey.

Our study aims to find answers to the following research questions:

What motivates people in Turkey to become a foster parent?

What are the experiences of foster parents in Turkey?

What are the difficulties of being a foster parent in Turkey?

What kind of supports do they need for providing foster care?

CHAPTER 2
METHOD

Thematic Analysis was used to understand the motivations and experiences of foster parents living in Istanbul, Turkey. It is a method to identify, analyze and report patterns in the data, which evolve into themes. This gives us a description of a data set in an organized and detailed way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By using Thematic Analysis, we have aimed to find answers to the aforementioned research questions.

2.1. THE PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR (PI) AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

I am a Turkish woman in the Clinical Psychology graduate program, Couple and Family Therapy track at a foundation university in Istanbul, Turkey. I have been counseling children and their families for many years. I am personally and

professionally interested in foster families, as a specific group of families who decide to open their homes to children in need. Foster families take care of a foster child who is not born into the family, but later comes home as a new member of the family and changes the relational dynamics in that family. Since foster care is a recently developing system in Turkey, people living in Turkey may have limited knowledge about this system and foster parents may not have a strong social support around them. All these complex factors might cause some difficulties for foster families and would not be overcome without commitment.

Based on the studies worldwide, altruistic motivations to foster a child are frequently seen reasons among other motivations. I am curious about what motivates people in Turkey to become a foster parent, how they experience foster parenting, what kind of difficulties they have, and the supports they need. I wanted to play a role in contributing to studies with foster parents which is strongly needed in the field and making their voices heard.

2.2. PARTICIPANTS

A small and homogeneous sample of 6 was used to explore and understand the motivations and experiences of foster parents. For small projects, 6 to10 sample size is suggested in qualitative studies. With a small and homogeneous sample, it is possible to find out the similarities and differences in detail between the experiences of the participants. To obtain a homogeneous sample we used a purposive sampling method. By using purposive sampling, we can reach a specific group of participants for whom the research questions have relevance and are meaningful (Guest et al., 2006).

For our study, we included foster parents who have at least one biological child, have been fostering a child for at least one year and up to three years, and living together with the partner. Another criterion was for foster children not to have any special needs. These criteria were set to be able to see changing family dynamics within and across sub-systems in the family with the recent inclusion of the foster child. Other criteria of inclusion were voluntariness to participate in the study and living in Istanbul.

The age range of foster children was another point we considered. To set a homogeneous sample, we formed our sample group as parents with foster children whose ages were not too different from each other (from 3 to 7 years old). In addition to the age proximity among children, we aimed the number of foster boys and girls who were taken care of by the parents in the sample group to be balanced.

Six couples were interviewed for the study. All couples were married and lived together. Mothers' age ranged from 45 to 50 and fathers' age ranged from 43 to 56. Mothers' education level ranged from secondary school degree to college degree. Fathers' education level ranged from primary school degree to master's degree. Two mothers were employed and four mothers were currently at home. Four fathers were employed and two fathers had retired.

As for foster children in the group of parents interviewed, there were three girls and three boys. Girls were 3, 4, and 5 years old. Boys were 3, 4.5, and 7 years old. All couples had at least one biological child whose ages ranged from 9,5 to 22. Two couples had only a son, two couples had only a daughter, and two couples had both a son and a daughter. (See Table 1 for the characteristics of foster parents, foster children and biological children.)

2.3. SETTING AND PROCEDURE

Before the study started, an ethics application was made to Istanbul Bilgi University Ethics Committee and the approval for the study was given. In addition, a written permission was required from the Ministry of Family and Social Policies to get in contact with foster families and start the interviews. A file including necessary documents with detailed information about the planned study was prepared by the primary investigator (PI) and dissertation advisor and sent to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. After the application, the PI made several phone calls to relevant departments at the Ministry to follow the status of the application and to answer any questions about the study. After 6 months, the approval was given for the study.

Dissertation advisor sent an email to Foster Family Branch Manager at Istanbul

Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Policies, regarding our study and finding participants according to the inclusion criteria we had defined. The branch manager sent a positive response about reaching appropriate participants. The PI visited the branch manager at his office and informed him about the study in more detail. The branch manager did a search on a computer file including the list of foster families in Istanbul. As a result, eight families were found that fit all the inclusion criteria.

The branch manager contacted the social workers who were responsible from keeping the files of these eight foster families assigned to them. There was a small meeting where the PI informed the social workers as well about the study, and the structure and setting of the planned interviews. After receiving these information, the social workers made initial phone calls to the eight families, asking for their willingness to participate in the study. All families responded positively, accepting to be interviewed.

After all families were contacted by the social workers, the PI called these families one by one on the list. She explained about the purpose of the study, the structure and setting of the interviews in detail, and answered any of their questions. She also made it clear that interviews would be conducted only with parents, without the foster child so that the parents would need to arrange a time either when the child was at school or could be in another room at home where s/he wouldn't hear the conversations during the interview.

When the parents were still willing to participate, the PI arranged a meeting at their homes at a convenient date and time that fit both the mother and the father. When a family did not have an available date and time for that week, she set a meeting later with that family and continued to call another family on the list.

Although there were eight families who were phone called by the social workers at the Foster Family Branch and had responded positively in the beginning, after the PI made phone calls to these families, two of the families were not able to meet with the PI. One couple had a busy work schedule and even though the PI made several phone calls to them in a period of a few months, they did not have an available time to meet.

In another couple, the mother told the PI that the family was going through some difficulties at that time and they would not feel like being interviewed. So, the interviews were conducted with six families. Interviews were conducted in participants' home with the foster father and mother together. Neither foster children nor biological children were included in the interviews since our study aimed to investigate parents' experiences and because of the need for the parents to answer questions in privacy.

2.4. DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted by the PI in the families' homes and each lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours. Through this type of data collection method, the researchers can have rich and detailed information about the topics explored. Semi-structured interviews allow for opening space and flexibility to the investigators where they can expand the dialogues with further questions (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Each participant signed an informed consent form in which the research purpose, the confidentiality issues and the right to leave from the study were explained (see Appendix A). After receiving each participant's informed consent, some demographic information was taken from all participants and then the interviews started. The PI followed an interview form when asking questions to the participants (see Appendix B). During each interview, the PI wrote down the conversations in detail and took some field notes as well. Field notes provide us information about the context of an interview. These are the observations by the interviewer about the physical setting, people present at the setting, and the interviewer's own feelings during an interview (Tessier, 2012). Later all written material was typed into separate documents for each family.

To ensure that nobody other than the researchers will have access to the data, all typed data was saved on the personal computer of the PI which was protected by a password. The identities of the participants were also kept confidential during all stages of the study and will continue to stay confidential after the study is completed. Data

will be erased six months after the dissertation is published.

In all families, the mother and the father were interviewed together because being a foster parent is a joint experience shared by the couples since they have lived through this together from the beginning and continue to parent jointly. Another reason for interviewing them together was to observe and note the verbal and non-verbal interactions between the partners.

2.5. DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic Analysis was used to analyze the whole data of the participants' accounts. In this way, it was possible to find out those commonalities in the similar experiences of the participants. Besides, any subtle differences in each participant's different story within those shared experiences were also taken into consideration and noted. The data were analyzed with MAXQDA software program.

The analysis was done following these six stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006): In the first stage, after each interview, all written conversations and the field notes taken by the PI were transferred into a typed document. To fully understand the experience of foster parents, each typed interview was read a few times to get a whole general idea within the data set. Then for each typed interview, the PI made initial notes of meanings of what the participants were discussing, looked for linguistic expressions (pauses, laughter, repetitions, metaphors, etc.), and also noted her reflections on the participants' verbal accounts. The data set was uploaded in MAXQDA software program to store and analyze the data. In the second stage, using this program, initial codes were developed, by selecting relevant data extracts and placing them within each named code, and this was done across the whole data set first. After having a list of a lot different codes in this way, the next step involved beginning to look for themes. In this third stage, the list of codes was sorted and combined into groups according to their relevancy to each other, which formed an initial thematic map of potential sub-themes and main themes. In the fourth stage, the potential themes formed in the former step were reviewed. The data extracts under each theme were reread and evaluated whether

those data extracts formed a coherent pattern within each theme. In addition to this, if the themes were not relevant, changes were made such as combining or separating themes and adding new themes where necessary. Also, the map of all themes was rechecked against whether they inclusively represented the whole data set. In the fifth stage, the themes were described and a detailed analysis of the meanings of the participants' verbal accounts within the data extracts were written. This was done for each sub-theme that were grouped together under different main themes. At this stage, the names of themes were also refined that best represented the participants' experiences. In the sixth stage, more examples of data extracts were added as needed and final analysis was done. The report of analysis was given its final shape with narratives created in an organized way that told the overall story of the participants.

2.6. TRUSTWORTHINESS

The researchers used various techniques to increase trustworthiness of the study. In addition to transferring the interviews with the participants into written documents, field notes were also taken for each interview. These different forms of data collection provided triangulation of data which increased the credibility of the study and contributed to doing a more comprehensive data analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). To reduce the potential for researcher bias, a triangulated investigator (thesis advisor) assisted the primary investigator in both forming the initial themes and final set of themes. When data analysis was completed and final themes were formed, for the purpose of member checking, the PI sent an e-mail to each participant with a description of these themes and asked them if they agreed on these themes as reflecting their perceptions and experiences as a foster parent (Creswell, 2009). Five families responded who agreed that these themes generally reflected their perceptions and experiences. After this, even these were minor comments, any additional opinions of the families were also included in the results section as well.

CHAPTER 3
RESULTS

Seven main themes were revealed from the data analysis: Motivations; The Process of Bonding with the Child; Difficulties of Being a Foster Family; Coping with the Difficulties; Transformation; Anxiety Related to the Child's Future; and Relationship with the System. Each main theme was further divided into sub-themes, which are presented here. The quotes were labeled as M1, F4, etc., the letter representing mother or father, and the numbers showing the interview order of that family. (e.g., If that family was the first one interviewed, the mother in that family was labeled as M1.) To keep the identities of the participants, the foster children and the biological children confidential, all their real names were changed with pseudonyms in the quotes. At the end of this chapter, there is also a section explaining the foster parents' joint experience, their interactions as a couple, and field notes.

3.1. MOTIVATIONS

Various reasons were found to be the motivations to become a foster parent. For each family, there were more than one kind of motivation that played a role in the decision of fostering. The most frequent reasons were as follows:

3.1.1. Awareness and Sensitivity

All families have an awareness of and sensitivity to the negative and difficult conditions that children who are homeless or in residential care live through. They are aware that there are children out there who need help and they have a high level of sensitivity to their needs.

A foster mother who was part of a group of social workers, used to visit children's state nurseries and her husband had sometimes joined her in these visits, so they had both seen these children there, learned about the children's past lives, and

were touched by their stories. The father mentioned that their foster daughter had a similar story, and the foster mother emphasized another point she has observed:

F6: "These children tell us about their past…There is violence at home…then mother and father break up…then they are taken to a police station or a hospital…The children go through these course of events…We heard a lot of stories when we were visiting these children at their nurseries. This is a similar case indeed and it's not just about not having enough money, there is also violence involved."

M6: "…Of course, children cannot be fed emotionally. I wish there were no children at all staying in the nurseries."

Another foster mother stated:

M3: "The most difficult thing these children face is having to leave residential care when they reach the age of 18. They don't have any place to go. This is really bad. They don't know any place or know anybody to go to, nothing. They either live on the streets or find somebody for shelter and this is really hard. God help them."

Another foster mother, as she was talking about her plans of reaching out to more children in need, also added how she and her husband both have had similar concerns for helping others:

M1: "When our children grow up a little more and when we also become more relaxed on financial matters, I want to do different things for all children as well…I can work on some social projects or I can work on things that will be helpful for everyone. I mean, we are not talking about just living for ourselves. We have always been worried about others too."

3.1.2. Saving a Child

All families wanted to help children and save them from the living conditions in their state residential homes and to touch their lives and give them a better life and future. As the couples told about how they decided fostering, it is understood that both the mothers and fathers had the same motivation of saving a child. For example, for the

following couple, the idea of taking in a child had come from the father first, but the mother explained how she supported her husband when he shared his idea with her:

M4: "I said ok right away (laughing). I wasn't working then and I thought I could take care of a child and be a good mother. I don't know, I hope I'm still a good mother. So, I said yes because I was at home and we really had to save a child from there. Then we went to speak to the Social Services Institution directly on that week and we handed in the documents on the same week…although our families of course told us not to do it…I mean the children must be saved from there. They really shouldn't be at the institution."

For another couple, it was the mother who had offered taking in a child, but the support she had received from her husband in wanting to save a child in this way was heard in her sentences:

M6: "I was already thinking about having another child just after I had Tunç. Later, I asked Barış for his opinion, I said 'Let's not give birth to a baby, but let's touch a child's life, what do you think?' He was very open to this and when I heard it I was shocked…Our families' initial reactions were like, 'Why don't you give birth to a baby?'. Then we told them, 'We would like to save a child's life, that's another way of giving birth', but they still were…"

For the following couple, wanting to save children with no home and touch their lives was clearly accompanied by feeling responsible for these children, and they both felt the same as they agreed with each other:

F2: "I think that foster family system should be very widespread. People discuss the problems of many homeless children on TV or media. They say that this causes crime and this and that. I think this is a social wound. Do we do anything as a society? First, we must do something as a society involving each person could whatever do. I looked it up and learned that there are 5, 000 foster families in Turkey. This number is very low in an 70-80 million country. I mean, we people always talk about the importance of being a family, but what we understand of a family is that it's only our

own child…In fact, there are a lot of children out there who could be cared in a family. So why are these children out there when being a family is so much important for us?"

M2: "When I first met him (our foster child) I thought we were late in being a foster family."

F2: "Frankly speaking, I still think about this. We should have done this much earlier. Maybe we could think about fostering one or two more children in the future. Another thing about these children is that they must leave state care when they turn 18. But you don't kick your own children out at 18, right?"

This father and mother had the same reasons to foster as they wanted to save a child, touch her life to give her a better one and wanted to help and protect her:

F4: "Our purpose of starting out to do this…at least mine, and I think Gamze's was the same, was to be helpful to someone. I wanted to take a child away from that setting so she could grow up in a better place. I could send her to a better school, guide her in a better way and protect her better than they could have done there on state care."

M4: "It was all the same for me."

The families, wanting to save children from their living conditions and give them a better life, have felt sad and had pity for them as well. These were common feelings effective on their decision of fostering. A foster father who had initially considered adopting a child said the following when asked how the desire of adopting grew:

F4: "In fact not because that I wanted to adopt a child, but I feel very sad for the children under state protection…I mean, it was just an idea on my mind that instead of making a second child, maybe it would be more right to adopt a child."

Some families also mentioned about how they felt sad or cried when they first met their foster child. During the interviews, recalling these feelings, some parents even cried while talking about these days. When they were asked about how they felt on the first time they met their foster child, a father and mother answered as follows, stating that it was an emotional moment for both: "We both cried, we cried a lot." (F1) "We cried a lot." (M1) (Her eyes full of tears, almost crying.)

Another foster mother shared the feelings she and her husband had on the day they first saw their foster child at the Bahçelievler state dormitory:

M5: "It was fine, very fine. I mean we were fine. I don't know, we also felt sad. We had different feelings, but it was fine…We thought how could his family have left him. He was so helpless that he would go with anybody who would held his hand. They brought the child in and showed him to us so he would be seen, as if a prospective bride shows off herself to be liked. So that was sad. I didn't feel good at all about it. But the child was very beautiful."

The families, feeling sad and having pity for the children, also have realized the children's emotional needs for love and attention and wanted to meet these needs when deciding to become foster families. A father and mother talked about how they felt when they saw the children in their dormitory at the time they went to see their foster child. While they were speaking, they were completing each other's sentences, indicating that they had the same feelings on that day:

F2: "…When you enter that dormitory you see the children's innocence, but there you also see their resentment, frustration and unhappiness. No matter how they might be cared well, there are certain things that could be done by caregivers there, like feeding children, giving them a warm place, providing their similar needs and that's all. Actually, you sense that thing inside the children, I mean they all look at the visitors like…right?"

M2: "Love me."

F2: "Love me or…"

M2: "Touch me."

F2: "They look at you like that so you feel it."

M2: "I felt the same. I already wanted to hug him warmly at that moment. I felt like he needed this."

Another foster mother had similarly felt sad and pity for the children in need, and wanted to meet their needs to be loved when making her final decision of being a foster parent:

M3: "Actually what effected my final decision was that…maybe you have seen it…a child at the nursery draws a mother figure on the floor with a chalk and lies in that drawing. The sight of that child was when I made the final point of my decision. Well, seeing her lying and sleeping in that figure of a mother on the concrete had affected me very much."

3.1.3. Being Influenced from Others

Some of the interviewed parents had learned foster family system from a friend or a family they knew who have been fostering and they were influenced from them in becoming a foster parent. A mother stated:

M2: "We had to see that being a mother or father would not be only through biological ways, because there were live examples around us. Besides that, here, where we live, a friend of mine also had gotten a foster child at that time, so I was able to observe them closely. I was doing ceramics at the workshop then and she was bringing the child there. So, this also induced me a lot."

A father explained that his wife had observed another foster family they knew and that was effective on their becoming a foster family, while he also pointed out that his wife was sensitive about children who do not live with their own parents because she herself had spent her childhood without a father. As he was speaking, his wife was nodding her head indicating that she agreed:

F3: "My wife Ayşe suggested me that we become a foster family, and then we started it. Because she had grown up without a father since she was a child. My son was studying in primary school then and he had a friend in his class. The family of his friend previously had taken in children as a foster family. They live here on just one street behind our house. They had taken in two siblings together. My wife asked me then, 'Shall we also take in a child?' Since she had grown up without a father, she has been sensitive about this subject. And she had seen these siblings with that family, so this is how it started."

For another foster mother, her visit to a charity was effective on their decision to take in a child:

M1: "In fact if we had better means…We've always considered this, I mean at least I have considered…I wish we could do something for more children, let's say five or ten more. I mean we could have them raised under different conditions. Actually, we had visited Aziz Nesin's charity when we were very young, at college. They set an example for us. I was very impressed there. You know, it's not a fully family environment, but it's a very warm environment that provides those children with different conditions. I was very nice there. And later we took in our daughter."

3.1.4. Wanting the Biological Child to Have a Sibling

In families with only one biological child, besides having some other motivations mentioned above, wanting the biological child to have a sibling is also seen to be an important factor in becoming a foster parent. For some of these families, although they wanted their child to have a sibling, it was impossible for them to have a second child biologically. Some other families had preferred adopting a child instead of conceiving a baby. In both cases, all of four families had first considered adopting a child, but later they chose to foster because it would be more difficult and take longer to adopt or because of the age limit required between the parents and the child for adoption.

It is understood that in four families, since they were an only child, biological children wanted a sibling or a playmate and had such motivation to accept the foster child. Besides that, in all of six families, biological children's opinions were considered as important by their parents when making the decision to foster. A father explained:

F1: "We had attempts to have our own child, for a second one, but it didn't happen. Then the only way possible was to have a test-tube baby. So, we decided to forget about it. And that was very effective on my convincement. I mean instead of making a test-tube baby and striving for it by medical methods, the option of taking a kid, taking a girl and raising her made more sense to me. And from then on, we said

let's do this. I already wanted Ege to have a sibling, you know, I didn't want him to be an only child. We also had that goal, so in that sense that's good. So, he's growing up with a sibling and that's much better for us."

Another mother and father had the same motivation, but the mother emphasized that having a second child at home was firstly their own daughter's wish, and they had wanted to make that real since they were feeling bad towards her:

M2: "A friend of mine from high school had become a foster family to twin siblings. This is in fact how we got the idea of fostering, but already our daughter, Sude had always wanted to have a sibling for years before that. We had tried it for about five years but I wasn't able to have a baby biologically. There was no chance of having a second child anymore. In fact, we started fostering so that she would have a sibling and we also thought it was the time to put our hands to this issue…I mean we dreamed of us as a cozy family with no change in our existing family structure but instead it would become stronger. Because Sude had always wanted to have a sibling and we were always feeling bad about it."

Another mother shared the same motivation with other families, but besides that she was grown up in a big family and that shaped her belief in the importance of her biological son to have a sibling:

F6: "My wife was grown up with her siblings, but I was an only child. She wanted it so much for our son, Tunç to have a sibling. Rather than wanting to have our second child, she actually wanted for Tunç to have a sibling."

M6: "I wanted him to grow up with a sibling."

F6: "Though his sister came after he grew up." (laughing)

M6: "Well, she still is a sister. Since I was grown up in a very crowded family, you know, I was telling my husband Barış that one should have a sibling. Barış was an only child and he was pretty content with that, so he had tried to instill in me that it wasn't a big deal if it didn't happen (laughing). But I'm still saying it, I mean a child should have a sibling. He should grow up with a sibling."

3.2. THE PROCESS OF BONDING WITH THE CHILD

After the children come to foster families' homes, parents accept the children initially, and as they share things together with the children, they get to know them better, get used to them by time, and they also embrace them more, and then they see them as their own children and as someone part of the family, while loving them very much and building a bonding with the children.

3.2.1. Getting Used to and Embracing the Child with Time

It is understood that since the families were already determined to foster from the beginning, they accepted and started to embrace their foster children from the very first moment, however it is also seen that they have embraced them and got used to them much more over time. A mother explained:

M6: "For example, when she first comes (to our home), you try to inhale her smell, and you feel the same smell. Now she starts to smell like me, I mean you're embracing her (smiles). Well, I said something different, it was a different description, but I mean you're embracing her more. I felt like giving such an example. But, you know, we had already embraced Esra a lot when she first came, she was already like our kid. We've come to like each other a lot. And when you see her relationship with her brother, then you're embracing her more, too."

A foster father mentioned that as he has shared more things with his foster child, he has known and embraced him more. He said: "After all, that's about sharing, the more you share things with him, the more you get to know him and maybe you embrace him more. So, that's probably the change in emotions." (F2)

A foster mother talked about how their relationship as parents has changed with their foster child over time. She also stated that she has embraced the child so much that she was forgetting her responsibility to the state or to the biological family for the child and that one day she might be taken back:

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M4: "I think Ayşe got used to us very quickly, I mean, I don't know what the child lives inside her, but Ayşe seemed like she got used to us a lot. But we got used to her too...Of course, now it's very different from when she first came. I mean, of course we get along with her much more...She has embraced us a lot now, we have embraced her too now. Ayşe is like my child now. Now, the thought of whether her family gets her back...I never think of it. And if something happens to her, whom I would be responsible to, I don't think at all about it now. Because anything could really happen at any moment while she's sitting next to me as well. It could happen while she's playing too, it's a very normal thing. Whatever could happen to Müge could happen to Ayşe too. I have overcome it now…everything could happen to her…"

3.2.2. Feeling the Child as Part of the Family (From the Beginning)

All interviewed parents see their foster child as one of their own children and as a member of the family. They have a sense of mutual belongingness. They also see themselves as the child's primary caretakers and take a possessive approach towards their foster child. A mother said:

M1: "She's a part of us now, she's our daughter. We're worried about her. They (state institutions) see it in a different way, and we feel it. They are still telling the biological mother, 'Oh, you're her…', yes, she's her biological mother, but we're raising this child. I mean, after all, she's our child now."

A father explained how he perceived his foster child as one of his children and how he felt about him:

F3: "I am not in favor of giving him back in any way unless the institution takes him. Let's say, the officer at the institution calls me now and tells me that 'The state won't give you a dime, so you can do whatever you want. So, either you look after the kid or you give him back.' Even if they told me that I still wouldn't give him back. It's a very different feeling anyway...What my kids are to me, he's the same for me. I mean, there is no difference between them. I see it that way."

A mother and father who plan to adopt their foster child said that they already perceived him now as their own child:

M2: "If his biological mother gives her approval, we will probably start the adoption process directly as first."

F2: "It's something on paper of course, you know, adoption..."

M2: "That's already how we see him now."

F2: "Yes, he's like a son to us."

M2: "Frankly, it's nothing more than a procedure for us now."

Almost all families said that they have been feeling as if their foster child has been with them from the beginning, forgetting that the child came from another family. Even though some factors such as home controls by the Foster Care Unit, the child's visits with the biological family and carrying a responsibility to the state for the child sometimes inevitably remind them of their foster parent role, they generally feel like they have always been together. Parents shared their experiences in the following statements:

M2: "I think we all felt the same way. It was like he was always with us. Sude said the same thing, and that's what I felt first. It felt like he was always with us from the beginning. I mean, we've always had that feeling..."

M5: "It's like he belongs to us, he's like our son now. We are forgetting that he's not one of us. I mean, we forgot that he came from another family. He's a member of our family. We've already forgotten."

F6: "Of course, it feels like in the first place…I mean you expect to feel like you've taken a stranger home. You don't feel that way, oh, it's like she's always been here…I mean I didn't feel like we were looking after someone else's child."

M6: "Yes, we didn't feel that way. It's like she's always been with us."

3.2.3. Loving the Child as Their Own

It is understood that as time passed, the interviewed parents have loved their foster child very much or so much as if s/he were their own child, and have been

attached to the child. Many parents said that in the beginning, the Foster Care Unit had told them that they should not see their foster child as their own or not get attached to the child much since s/he could be taken from them and be given back to his/her biological family at any time from then on. Despite these talks, loving the child and being attached to him/her with time was inevitable for the parents. A mother expressed her love for her foster child: "…Believe me, now I love him more than I love my own children." She had similar feelings with her husband for the child, which they explained as follows:

M3: "You know, for example, the institution says, don't get too attached. And how can I not get attached? I'm together with this kid day and night."

F3: "I've cleaned his bottom, how can I not get attached?"

M3: "I cannot give love to the kid if I cannot get attached to him anyway."

F3: "Yes, otherwise we cannot give him love, and logically then he wouldn't have a place in this house anyway."

M3: "You know, they say, he can go any time and think of it as he was entrusted to you."

F3: "Oh yes, exactly. That's how they talked to us in the first place. But it's not really like that."

M3: "If you see the kid that way, you cannot give the kid anything."

Another mother and father explained how they both loved their foster daughter as their own:

M1: "We thought we could only love her this much if she was our own kid. Because that we have our own kid as well, we can compare it. Actually, we understood that being related with blood biologically doesn't really matter much. We love her like our own kid, right?" (asking her husband)

F1: "Absolutely. Now she's already our own kid until we die."

Another mother expressed her love for her foster daughter by comparing it with her love for her biological son:

M6: "Well, it's not like that I didn't think if Tunç would get jealous. I was even wondering if I would love these (foster) children in a different way when I don't have the second child…like how should be this love, what should be the definition of this love. No, it's the same. I was always asking my mother or to the elders whether there is a degree, for example, do you love my sibling more or me? But I see now, there is indeed nothing like that, I mean the love of the two children is the same."

Another mother and father both stated how their relationship with their foster child changed by time: "Of course, we are more bonding with each other, of course the commitment increases." (F2) "It's growing. The change is…it gets stronger in the sense of commitment." (M2)

Another father shared his feelings for their foster daughter as follows:

F6: "Of course, at first you feel like there is a plus person at home. After a while, you feel like it's one minus when she is not there. I mean her absence is like a question mark this time. You know, then the house gets quiet."

3.3.   DIFFICULTIES OF BEING A FOSTER FAMILY

3.3.1. The Child's Transition from Multiple Mothers to one Mother and Father

Based on the information given by the interviewed families, their foster children either had been left to the institution either as infants or immediately after they were born by their biological families since they could not take care of the children or the neighbors had informed the State because of neglect of the children, so the State had taken the children under protection. So, the children mostly had not spent enough time to build a bonding relationship with their biological mothers. One of the children had stayed longer with her biological family but she had bad memories of them since she was exposed to violence at home. Except that one child, in all other families, the children did never know the figure of a father before they came to foster homes because of various reasons, such as either the child was illegitimate (out of marriage) or the

father was involved in crime or was having treatment, and therefore the biological fathers were not present.

With such a background, the children, after being placed under state protection, start to stay in dormitories. According to the foster parents' statements, there are many nursing women who care for these children in dormitories, and the children see every caregiver there as a mother, which means the children interact with variable multi-mother figures. After the children are placed in foster homes, as the foster parents accept and get used to the children, they also feel the desire to be accepted in return by the children as soon as possible and to build a parental relationship with them. However, as different from their past, the children then just begin to have a relationship with one mother and father figure and may experience some bonding difficulties in the process of adjusting to the family.

A mother and father described the new and different experience they lived with their foster child, since she had multi-caregivers in her life before she came to their home: They shared their experience which they both had observed the same:

M1: "It didn't really matter to her who it was because there were so many nurses, different nurses and dormitory mothers there. Nehir was smiling at everyone, that was something we lived with her after she came. I mean it didn't matter to her whether it was me or it was one of the babysitters we had…I mean, the thing you see with babies, choosing the mother, and I saw it in my son…but Nehir had no choice of mother, and she didn't have that for a long time..."

F1: "The perception of choosing parents... she didn't have much differentiation."

M1: "Almost until she was 1 year old."

F1: "It took at least six months."

M1: "Yes, at least six months. She was smiling and going to everyone, she wasn't differentiating at all."

F1: "If anybody asked her to come with her, she would take her away, you know? I mean, she didn't show the reflex to stay here, stay with mom."

M1: "No. She didn't choose at all."

F1: "We were very surprised, of course."

M1: "Of course, naturally we were surprised, you know..."

F1: "Because after the experience of having our own son, of course, it was different for us."

Another mother was concerned about whether her foster child was securely attached to her:

M2: "Frankly speaking, Ozan's feelings are variable. In fact, that's what makes me feel uneasy right now. I have this feeling, has he really bonded with me securely or am I too a temporary person for him? Because there are two people, and he can choose these two people over me. One is Emel, she's the mother of his friend and the other person is his aunt, I mean my sister. When he's together with them, he can dismiss me completely. I wonder if I could build that secure bonding with Ozan in his terms or you know, the mother-child bond…sometimes I think of this. Because it's an energy issue, and if it doesn't work, it doesn't…When I'm saying his feelings might be changing, I mean when he's together with these two people, his attitudes towards me change. Whether his feelings have changed…of course emotionally, I feel some of the reflections at that moment. For example, he can tell me to go away or he can say, 'I want my aunt to be my mom.' So, when these two people are present, his feelings for me change. But other than that...the mother is indispensable...mostly."

The same mother and her husband explained how their foster son learned the concept of mother and father and how the father's relationship with the child became better over time:

F2: "Maybe he warmed up to me a little more or you know, he got used to me more...You know, of course, when Ozan first came in, everyone was a mother to him, and a man was a mother too."

M2: "The concept of mother…the person who looked after him was a mother to him."

F2: "I mean, you know, the mother…he has grasped that concept a little bit...things have changed, and with me he's more…I mean we can communicate with

each other in a better way, and we have something special to us…As we did more things together, just two of us, not with anybody else, I mean with me he became more…"

M2: "It took him a long time to adapt with the father because he didn't have a male figure in his life at that time."

3.3.2. Mutual Adjustment Difficulties Between the Child and the Foster Family

When families first applied to be foster parents, the demand for a boy or a girl varied among the families, but they all requested for a child at an early age. Although the exact age range they preferred varied slightly among the families, all families wanted and received a child who was no more a baby but also had not started primary school, and who was at an age ranging from 1 to 6 years old. The underlying reason was that the families cared about the child's growing up in the family, so that the child would get used to and adapt to the family, and they would embrace each other.

Although all families had received children who were at a very young age, after the children came home from the institution, they had some difficulties in adjusting to their foster families, and the families had some difficulties in adjusting to the children as well. Most families lived through a faltering period with strain for 6 months or more time, for 1 to 2 years. Only one family, despite going through an adjustment process with the child like all other families had, did not evaluate this time as difficult. The children who came home were seen by the parents as part of the family, while they all expected the children to adapt to their family structure and culture over time.

The children brought their habits to foster homes relating to sleeping, eating and order that they had gained during their stay in the dormitories. So, it took some time for children to change these habits, to behave the way the families expected from them and to adapt to the order of the house. Two families commented that as the age of the child becomes older or the time s/he has stayed in the institution is longer before coming to foster home, it would be more difficult for the child and the family to adjust to each other. One mother in one of these families said that since they had taken in their

daughter when she was only 6 months old, the adaptation process with the child was easier.

A mother and father mentioned about the difficulties they lived at the time their foster child came home until she got used to sleeping in her own room:

F4: "They make the kids sleep in a place like a dormitory, and then they shut the door and leave. So, when she came here, she didn't sleep in her bed for a few months. She was getting up, then we were taking her to her bed, and then we were going in to another room, but when we come back, she was in the hallway, she was lying on the floor in the hallway."

M4: "We heard that all children are doing this in the dormitory."

F4: "So at first, four or five times a day, I was keeping on putting her to the bed, but she was coming back again."

M4: "She was lying where we were, I mean where she could see us. Because at the institution, the nurses would put the children in their room and they would sleep in the next room, and the kids would come out and sleep in that hallway so they could see the nurses. So, having that habit, she wanted to see us…But at nights we would get up, and we were sleepy, and then there we would see Ayşe sleeping on the floor...on the stone…and it was winter... She would get up from her bed again and come back to the hallway again. But it's all over now. I think it was the first thing to be over."

Some parents also mentioned that in the beginning, the children used to eat too fast and too much food, because they had developed a fear at the dormitory that the food would be taken away from them while they were eating, so they continued to do so for a while after they had come home. They explained that this was related to the expectation from the children at the dormitory to eat fast at meal times within a time limit, and the fears of the children that the other children could take their food if they stopped eating. It would also be sensible to think that eating too much might be related to eating without being aware of getting full because of eating too fast or it might perhaps have served to compensate the emotional hunger the children had felt in the dormitory by eating. A father shared their experience:

F3: "After this kid came home, when food was put in front of him, he was eating so fast...and he had his eye on someone else's plate. And why is that? He told us later...The mothers there would put the food in front of them, they would count minutes and tell the kids to finish quickly, so they would eat fast. Then the leftovers would go straight to the trash. So, he was eating fast, and he was like, I'll finish it off and I'll eat the other one. I was surprised, why is this kid eating so fast? I was telling him: 'Oh son, is there anyone here who takes it from you? Why are you in such a hurry? Eat slowly.' He was too fast and eating like he was never full at all. We'd put this food in front of him, let's say five seconds later, he'd shovel it into his mouth."

Another family shared their similar experience:

M5: "When Ahmet first came…for example he was drinking juice, he was drinking it without breathing. His eyes were getting red, and tears were running through his eyes."

F5: "There (in the institution) if he left the half of it, another child would take and drink it...He would fill up his mouth with grapes and eat all of it."

M5: "I would put a huge plate of grapes, but he would eat so much…He had fears that it would be finished and there would be no more."

F5: "Because when his food was finished, there was nobody who would bring some more and tell him to eat more (in the institution). So, he was trying to finish immediately at that moment."

In most families, after being placed in homes, the children had fears that they would be left or be sent back to the institution, and because of this the families had trouble with the children getting anxious, stressful or crying, when they were getting out of the house to do their daily activities or at sleeping times of the children and it took a while to get over these fears. A mother and father talked about the difficulty they lived in the beginning:

M4: "...She couldn't get in the car when she first came...So, I couldn't go anywhere, or when we got in the car, we were going in a crisis."

F4: "I guess she had a fear of something. She had the fear that we would take her back. We couldn't also put on her shoes. When she saw the shoes or the car…The first time she cried…we bought shoes for her because otherwise her feet would get cold…new shoes. I said, come here, let's put on these shoes. As soon as she saw the shoes, she started to cry, and we couldn't silence her."

M4: "She was having a crisis because she was leaving home. So, they were very hard."

Almost all the families were challenged because their foster children were very active after they had come home. Besides being very active, they were also curious about the objects at home or their surroundings outside which could be dangerous for a child, and some families stated that it was a matter of concern for them because of being accountable to the state if anything wrong happened to the child. Pointing out that their biological children were generally quiet children, the families had difficulty adapting to their foster child because they have been raising a very active child for the first time and because of the challenge of keeping up with the child's energy due to feeling quite older. Some families have quite adapted to this characteristic of the foster children over time, while some others are still challenged to some degree. A father and mother explained as follows:

F4: "Our daughter has always been such a calm girl since she was a baby. She plays by herself, she doesn't cry, and so on."

M4: "We had a very easy life."

F4: "We didn't think about it, but you know, we probably had a preconception that all kids are like that."

M4 (laughing): "Because our neighbors wouldn't realize that we were at home…I mean, we're so quiet, all three of us."

F4: "We're quiet, and our daughter is very quiet, too."

M4: "We're very quiet. I mean, I'm the loudest one in the house…but before Ayşe came here, it didn't seem like we were really at home. I mean, Müge plays for hours inside, and she comes and sits here, and if we're watching TV, she doesn't bother

us at all. So, the kid who came from the institution, on the day they gave us her, they really put her out of the door and locked the door. So... when they gave us her, they told us that we were getting a little active kid. I said that's ok, I'm sure she'll conform to the dynamics of our house. But she didn't (smiling) and she still doesn't...Our dynamics has increased a lot and unfortunately, I've turned into a very loud mother. This kid... well, that's the way she is. She's very active and very stubborn..."

The same mother said that after their foster child came home, because of the difficulties of dealing with her, she became a very loud and angry mother and this affected her husband's and daughter's moods and they had a temper as well, but she also added that things have settled down later and they are a calmer family now.

Based on the families' statements, because of the limits set to the children in the dormitory, such as expecting them to follow firm rules, allowing them to go out up to a certain distance, and less variety of stimuli present there, the children's much activity could be related to trying to push the boundaries with their arrival to a home environment, seeking to discover their new surroundings, and to their curiosity about the objects at home that they haven't seen before at the dormitory.

A mother described the difficulties they had with the child for about six months:

M2: "He was very curious about the electronics, for example the washing machine and the dishwasher. He was trying to get into the TV. He was trying to feed it with his food, he was checking the front of it, and trying to get into the behind of it. We had some serious problems with the TV. He wasn't watching the TV, but when the TV was on, he was trying to contact with those sounds. Because he had probably never seen a TV in the institution...He even tried to feed it a few times...he was trying to feed it with his fruit, and persistently trying to get inside of it. He would always push his limits, so he would want to get in there as well. We had a hard time with TV. He had a lot of interest in electrical goods and sockets around home. We mostly feared of these. Because probably he was always blocked from doing that sort of things in the institution. But here these were always within his reach...Maybe we've been dealing with this for six months. Now he doesn't touch them anymore…We were too much on

our feet and always after him because we were so afraid that he would get hurt. Most of all, we were afraid because of the stairs."

The same mother also said the following:

M2: "Now, well, we've taken a break for so long, and we're raising a boy child as well...And we were just adapting to him, and trying to set some rules. Maybe the hardest time was those first six months. Because there's also a feeling of despair, at some point you're running out of all your methods. What am I going to do with this, and how is it going to last if it goes on like this? How are we going to do it, how is it going to go at this pace, I mean, we've given it a lot of thought."

All parents have had difficulty in coping with the foster children's unwanted behaviors such as opposing rules and limits, aggressive behavior, hitting, fighting with siblings, trying to have something by crying, being stubborn, eating very slowly or little, and keeping their room tidy. Some families had also problems in communicating with the child in the beginning. Since the parents have wanted to set limits and rules for their foster children, and wanted to apply the same discipline to them which they have applied to their own children, there have been conflicts between the parents and the foster children. However, in some families, differences are seen in the approach of mothers and fathers to the foster child where the mother is softer and the father is tougher in the discipline on the child or the opposite, where the father is softer on the child and the mother is tougher or more determined with the discipline.

In most families, when the parents were talking about their biological children and foster children, they did not only compare them in terms of being very active that was a challenge for them, but also in terms of being social, outgoing, fields of their interests and some other different characteristics and behaviors, which were the positive aspects of the foster children as seen by the parents. In this respect, it is again understood that the families have gone through a process of getting to know and adjusting to a new child.

Although being a foster family has brought some difficulties related to looking after a very young child again after having raised biological children, and reorganizing

the family's daily life according to the child's priorities and schedule, most families said that they had made their decision to foster already considering these difficulties from the beginning. Only one family said that they had made a fast decision of fostering and that they didn't know the challenges of it when they made the decision.

3.3.3. Difficulties Related to Biological Family Visits

Among the interviewed families, after coming to their foster homes, one child's biological mother has never come to see him, and another child has seen her biological mother only once. Four all six children, their fathers are already not present. But for the four children, their biological mothers and siblings come to visit them at the institution and because of these visits both these children and their foster parents are going through some difficulties. According to the foster parents, some children get anxious, stressed, and nervous before and on the day of the biological family visits. The children who don't know yet that the visiting mothers are their real mothers, can get confused and have questions on their minds when they see them. These visits also cause strain for the foster parents who said that they too felt anxious and nervous before and on the day of taking the child to biological family visits.

According to the foster parents, all the four children experience uneasiness, stress and anxiety in the periods after biological family visits. They also stated that they have observed changes in the children's behaviors such as being nervous, irritable or stubborn, and seen symptoms of nail biting, thumb sucking or wetting their pants. One foster mother said that at these times the school too has observed changes in her foster daughter's behavior such as acting independently and disobeying the rules. Of course, all these negative changes in the children's psychological state affect foster parents and their relationship with the children as they try to cope with their behaviors or symptoms.

A mother stated the following:

M2: "Since last month's visit of his biological mother, Ozan has started to wet his pants. He was wetting his pants at school, and he became irritable (her voice sounds sad). For the last week or two weeks, maybe he got better...And I immediately talked

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to our social worker about this and she said that like irritation, wetting pants and hiding objects, they have seen these kinds of behaviors very often in children when their consciousness begins to realize that something is going wrong. And she said, 'Now we're beginning the process of facing the reality.' And I think we're going to explain to him the truth towards summer. So now what gives me the most strain is taking him to the visits (her voice sounds sad and worried) …Taking him to see the biological mother (her voice sounds very annoyed). This is the most serious problem I am experiencing. Even though I try not to make Ozan feel me, I feel uneasy a week before it."

Another foster family shared the following:

F6: "...Well, she was biting her nails, it's over now...Now she's doing the thumb-sucking more frequently again. She was doing it less for a while. After the family visits, she does it more frequently."

M6: "I don't know, what's the thing about it, this thumb sucking...it means something. Of course, I did a search for it, you know, probably it's about feeling insecure. Maybe it's about the anxiety of where she belongs to."

F6: "She says, 'I'm going to miss you guys so much'… so, she doesn't know exactly what's going to happen."

Another foster father described the anxiety he has whenever he takes the child to her biological family visits:

F1: "Sure, you said anxiety... yes, that's an hour's visit, especially whenever I take her to Bahçelievler, I get very nervous. I wonder if they're going to make me meet the real family... Now, after that incident, after that attempt, I have this fear, whether they're going to make me meet the real family as a surprise, or what they're saying to that kid at the visits."

3.3.4. Limitations on the Foster Family

Other difficulties mentioned by the parents were: Not having the same freedom or not being able to do the things they like as they did before starting fostering, and having to stay more at home; changes or limitations on vacation plans, for example not

being able to go abroad because they could not get a passport for the foster child or traveling abroad for a short time without the child; organizing the family's daily life according to the child's priorities and schedule; and everyone in the family sacrificing their time to take care of the child.

These parents expressed the difficulty they have lived:

F1: "Our freedoms have been quite limited of course, because she's a little kid. We stay more at home. We have the priorities of Nehir, the priorities of Ege. Ege has grown up though, but of course since Nehir is little, her priorities are the most important things at home now, very important."

M1: "We plan everything accordingly."

F1: "Everything accordingly, time for sleeping and getting up at home, meal time, think about everything. Things like shopping and planning the day or something like that...They are planned according to Nehir and Ege, especially Nehir."

Another mother and father explained how everyone at home was making a sacrifice:

F5: "Everyone makes a sacrifice, I mean everyone gives some of their time."

M5: "Everybody does it."

F5: "I'm the least giving one at home. I mean everyone gives it. I go out after a while, for example I go to work, or I go around somewhere when I must go. But someone has to be at home at 4 o'clock to get Ahmet."

M5: "Of course, he will come home then by school bus."

F5: "Somebody is on guard. Everyone arranges themselves accordingly."

M5: "For example, the kids do their homework after Ahmet goes to bed so before that they can spend time with him. They do their chores after he goes to bed. They take a shower after he goes to bed."

F5: "Even though these are nice things, they are hard as well."

M5: "Yes, very much. Because he wants to see everyone together, so we get all together."

F5: "The only hard thing is that we sacrifice our time."

M5: "But it's fine, no one complains anyway."

F5: "Things are arranged accordingly. That's the difficulty."

M5: "Because, for example, Ahmet wouldn't leave his elder sister alone, so she wouldn't be able to start her homework. Even if she started it he would still call her, 'Sister, sister…' After we spend some time together, and after he goes to bed, then everyone is on their own."

Another mother described the restrictions on the family:

M4: "A friend of mine asked me for someone else, 'Do you recommend it? (being a foster family)'. I said, 'I wouldn't recommend it in any way for a woman in her forties and living alone…or tell her all about these. Because this is a life which will be restricted instantly'. We wanted to settle abroad once. But of course, we couldn't do it because of this. Travelling is not allowed anyway. We can't go for a trip. It's been 2 years and we still couldn't get a passport. That's what I mean when I say difficulties. The state procedures take so long, like since November…we still have a long way until we get our passports. Then we will apply for a visa after receiving the passports."

3.4. COPING WITH THE DIFFICULTIES

The difficulties experienced by the parents after they started fostering were overcome or lessened over time. Support received in the nuclear family and from other people with whom they have close relationships, has been one of the factors that was effective on this. Other ways of managing to deal with the difficulties by the foster parents were: Time factor and growing up of the children; setting rules and limits for the children; benefiting from parental experiences; feeling love and having acceptance, empathy, and patience for the children; seeing the positives in the child; and having a humorous approach towards events or issues.

3.4.1. Support in the Family and from Close Ties

Among the six families interviewed, in only one family, the desire to take and raise a child has first come from the father who had initially considered adopting a

child, and in the other five families, it has first come from the mothers. Among these five families, three families also had initially considered adopting a child, and the mothers' desire to take and raise a child was supported by the fathers as well. In the remaining two families, although in the beginning the fathers had a lot of concerns before becoming a foster family, they were convinced and accepted it later.

In those families in which the mother is at home, mostly the mothers handle taking care of the foster children, while in those families in which the mother is working, the fathers are as active as the mothers in this regard, and they carry out the daily tasks such as dressing up the children in the morning, taking them to school or school bus, and helping them with eating meals. A father even said that he was more involved now in caring for his foster son than he had been to his own children in the past. It seems that the fathers not only support the mothers in taking care of the children but also in overcoming difficulties of fostering.

A mother mentioned how they supported each other with her husband:
M6: "We always have a chance of passing it to each other easily, I mean before it becomes too much, because Barış has more free time now…On the other hand, honestly, it has surprised me a little bit that Esra favors her father so much, and that he does so much for Esra, too. I watch it with such an amazement. But I can easily hand her over to her father about everything. So, I think things are going easy because we help each other."

Some fathers mentioned appreciatively that their wives have given much effort as foster mothers, and the mothers were pleased with their husbands' support in taking care of the child, which were realized in both of their words and voice tones when they were talking about these points. Therefore, although the couples have had some difficulties together, living through a challenging experience with their spouse may have perhaps increased their feelings of trust in each other and have strengthened their relationships.

It is understood that in all families, biological children were included in the conversations of deciding about fostering and their opinions were considered important.

In addition, in all families, from the beginning, the biological children wanted the foster children as a sibling before they came home or the parents prepared and persuaded them beforehand, so the foster children were accepted by them. After the children's arrival at home, biological children have taken care of the children, spent time and played together with them, which has served as support for their parents. Because of their support, mothers and fathers can have a break from their daily routines and have more time left for themselves. A mother even said that she wouldn't have been able to work if she did not have the support of her biological children for taking care of the foster child. Besides that, biological children have also contributed to the foster children's adaptation to home, and to their physical and psychological well-being. The parents had the advantage of receiving their help and the biological children who were an only child and had wanted to have a sibling or playmate, have gained a benefit as well.

A mother and father talked about the support of their biological children:

M3: "Even if I go out somewhere with my husband, Emre already likes spending time with his elder brother and elder sister at home."

F3: "It's been an advantage for us that Emre has an elder brother and elder sister. When a husband and wife have no children, and after they take a child home, then the wife would mostly take care of the child and might be neglecting her husband. But that didn't happen with us, I mean we have that advantage, and maybe it's because of our children…By the way, be grateful to the children (saying to his wife and laughing) …For example, let's say we'll go somewhere, me and my wife, I mean let's think it that way. Let's say we'll have a dinner out. Then we can leave Emre here with the children. He stays with them, and so we can go out."

Another mother and father who feel quite old, talked about the support of their biological children, whom they see as grown up adults now. They expected from them to continue their support in the future as well and it seemed clear that they both had confidence in them in this regard:

F5: "We are sure that after us, his elder brother and elder sister will continue to be parenting him in the same way..."

M5: "They will already keep it going. They will not leave him anyway."

F5: "They will keep it going, in the time he stays with us."

M5: "As long as he's with us."

F5: "So, we are relaxed in that matter. Their age ranges are quite wide. So, there will not be any trouble. Some people worry about what's going to happen to the kid after they die because their kid is little. But we don't have that concern about Ahmet."

M5: "No, we don't. And my son and daughter love him so much that they both say they wish they would give him to us for adoption."

When the families had decided to foster, only two families received acceptance and support from their extended families relating to this decision. Some families also mentioned that they received support from some of their friends. Nevertheless, for all the participant families, either their extended families, if not, either some of their friends or neighbors had difficulty accepting the idea of being a foster family and opposed it. They criticized becoming a foster family and had negative reactions to it. However, although the people around them were not convinced, in four families both mothers and fathers, and in two families, despite the doubts of fathers in the beginning, mothers were determined to become a foster family.

After the foster children's arrival to home, although some families were still faced with some questions, negative reactions or criticisms from neighbors or friends, these stayed few. All six families have received support from their extended families as well as from their friends after these people met the foster children. The reasons behind this support were, the families' determination to begin and continue fostering and the mutual love that has developed between these people and the foster children. The extended families have given emotional support to the foster families by accepting and embracing the children, showing love and caring for the children and have formed a bonding with them. The children have also communicated well with the extended families and have showed love, caring and affection for them. Thus, although the

families have lived through some difficulties of fostering, at least they did not struggle with their relatives' opposition anymore, and with their support, they may even have seen fostering as more meaningful and may have been more motivated. In fact, similarly, some families said that when they heard appreciative words from people around them, such as that they were doing a very valuable job by taking care of a child in need and that they were very good people or would have a place in heaven, they humorously said that because of these praising comments they "put on airs".

A mother talked about how the views of their relatives and friends changed after they met their foster child:

M1: "Everyone loves Nehir so much, her grandmother and grandfather…At first, everyone opposed us to be foster parents, but now they love her so much…Her aunt, uncle, our close friends, everyone...My husband's relatives too, they actually strongly opposed it…and my mother and my father opposed it, too. But later they loved her very much. Actually, they embraced her a lot from the first moment they saw her. Now they love her so much. Her grandparents don't live here. Her grandmother sends her dresses and socks. She asks me, 'Mom, who sent this?' and I say your grandmother did. Then she keeps on saying 'Let's go to my grandparents.' Because they love her very much…Already our close friends have always embraced her from the beginning. At first, some of them also opposed it, but later… It really seemed like it was cut with a knife at once. I mean it didn't take such a process. Everything changed suddenly."

3.4.2. Time/Growing Up

The difficulties with the foster children have decreased with factors such as seeing positive changes in the children's behaviors as they have grown up, better communication with them over time, getting to know the children better over time and following some parental approaches accordingly. A mother and father shared their experience as follows:

M4: "She was crying constantly until three months ago. Now there is a decrease in her crying..."

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F4: "As she grows up, it decreases a little...One thing is, she grew up, and as she grew up she started speaking. When she started speaking, she began to communicate with us."

M4: "Even though she doesn't listen."

F4: "Even though she doesn't listen, she's now at least able to say what she wants."

Another mother mentioned that as she got to know her foster child better over time, she developed methods accordingly:

M6: "So after a while when you know your kid, you are developing ways of how to behave her. For five, six months, we went through the process of getting to know the kid. Because you don't know what she reacts to…She's stubborn, very stubborn…Now I know that she gets stubborn, then I say to myself, don't push her too far, then let's find another way. For example, she insists on wearing a dress, and then I tell her, 'Well, look at this, there's another dress here and this will be very nice on that one.' So, I give her such ideas and confuse her mind so I distract her attention away. I have found such a method, well, what should I do?" (laughing)

Another mother and father who had a challenging time of adapting to the child and setting rules for him for the first six months said that it was experienced in that period and resolved spontaneously when asked how they solved the difficulties. So, it can be inferred that after this child spent some time with his foster family, his adaptation to the family began to take place as well:

F2: "Maybe I would say spontaneously…"

M2: "Spontaneously."

F2: "...It's experienced for a period of time."

M2: "He (Ozan) has given up."

3.4.3. Setting Rules and Limits

In order to deal with the foster children's behaviors, all parents have set some rules and limits for them and tried to instill discipline in them as they have also done

with their biological children. That was part of the adaptation process to each other with their foster children, and they still maintain this parental approach towards them.

The same parents who said that the difficult times they lived with their foster child lasted for a period and was overcome spontaneously over time, also mentioned that trying to set rules and discipline on the child was helpful as well in this process:

F2: "Of course, we made an effort, too. Explaining things to him or persuading him…"

M2: "Of course, we were always trying to make suggestions."

F2: "Sometimes there was punishment..."

M2: "Sit down on the stairs and think. That kind of punishment."

F2: "Sit down on the stairs or go into that room and think…So, we tried to handle it with that kind of things."

M2: "We were mostly sitting down together on the stairs and thinking. 'Come on, think about what you've done.' (Laughing, her voice is compassionate). That was the staircase for thinking (smiling). He was putting his hands on his face and thinking like this. But six months later, there were no more things like that. At the age of two and half, the rules were set."

F2: "Of course he got used to it, too."

M2: "The rules were set, they were partially set."

Another mother also talked about their efforts to set rules and limits for their foster daughter:

M1: "She always wants to get what she says. Actually, we're somewhat struggling with this. I mean she's trying to get it done by crying. We've been struggling with this for quite some time. We tell her, 'Don't want anything by crying. We have rules, you can't have everything you want.' We try to set them, because now she understands everything."

As another mother and father talked about the disciplined approach they have followed for their foster child, it is understood that they were worried about not being able to cope with the child otherwise:

M3: "We don't behave him differently. I mean, whatever discipline we apply to our own kids, we do the same for him. There is no such difference."

F3: "Of course, when he does something wrong and we must get angry with him, then we get angry. We don't think like, what if they would say to us this and that… (referring to The Foster Care Unit) Because if we miss that point, we can't prevent it. Because there is something with these kids, and he already had it in the first place, he was trying to have us in the palm of his hand, he was trying to take hold of us. Of course, it didn't happen right away, a month or two, three months, maybe four months later we began to understand it. Because he got used to our home, and then he started to have us in the palm of his hand. He was saying 'I want this' and when he couldn't get something done, he was right away faking that he was crying. He wasn't really crying."

3.4.4. Benefiting from Parental Experiences

Most families stated that in their parental approaches to their foster child and when they were challenged with issues relating to the child, they have benefited from their past experiences of raising their biological children. Because of these parental experiences, they can better understand their foster child and develop solutions to issues. Some parents regard some of the child's negative behaviors as normal as in every child.

A mother expressed:

M2: "…Firstly, the arm breaks and stays in the sleeve, I mean we handle many things within ourselves. Because we did so with our own daughter, and we are doing the same things for Ozan. There are some experiences we lived before. Based on those experiences, we approach Ozan in that way as well. Because we are not such inexperienced parents."

A father who mentioned that they attended the seminars of the Foster Care Unit before receiving a foster family certificate, even was not much open to any parental

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training since he thought that he was already competent in his parental skills as he had the experience of raising his own children:

F3: "…They issued such a certificate. During that time, they were telling us a few things, like how you should approach the child, you should play with them like that…But that's not ok with me, and you may ask why, if I didn't have any children, then it would be ok. Oh, well, I think it might be good that I received it, but I believe it's just a waste of time for both them and me because…you (his wife) and I can guess how the child's psychology would be, after he comes from there (the institution). Because from my point of view, I think that I have raised two children myself."

The same father also expressed what he has learned about how to approach a child:

F3: "How much you give him water, he gives you that much bread in return…so that's efficient. As much love he receives from us, he makes himself that much closer to us. That's the same with your own child, too. If you treat your own child badly, he puts a distance between him and you."

Another father expressed that it would be more difficult for people without own children to be a foster family, implying that they have benefited from their own parental experiences in their approaches to their foster child:

F5: "Well, it may be tougher for a person who has not raised a child at home…I mean that process. I think it wasn't that hard for us to need one-to-one psychological support or an expert's support, since we have gone through this process."

The following parents also mentioned that they have benefited from their experiences with their own child to some degree, but in addition, they stated that their methods sometimes did not work and they figured out new methods:

M6: "You don't want to compromise because you know…she needs to learn things, but we find some methods on our own."

F6: "Some of what we have applied with Tunç works out fine with Esra, too, but some of them do not work. Because simply one of them is a boy and the other one is a girl. Their behavior styles are different."

3.4.5. Love, Acceptance, Empathy and Patience

While parents had difficulties with the foster children, their love, empathy and understanding for them; acceptance of the characteristics of the children after some time; and the ability to show patience, were other factors that determined how they perceived the difficulties they experienced and enabled them to cope with them.

A mother and father who had lived difficulties in the beginning relating to caring again for a child who was at a very early age, were asked about what helped them to overcome these difficulties and they both answered that it was the love for their foster daughter:

M1: "Because we loved Nehir so much..."

F1: "Love."

M1: "With love, exactly. I suppose we faltered, we lived that, I can understand it better now. We couldn't understand it at that time...We thought we could only love her this much if she was our own kid. So, I think we got over it with that. It's a little like that because that's effort. After all, it's about sharing. Because so are the relationships. It's so for a kid, and it's so for parents, too. I mean, because after a while, she loves you very much, too…"

There was only one family who evaluated the whole process beginning from the orientation week to taking their foster child to their home until now as not difficult, despite living through a mutual adaptation process with their foster child like all other families have lived. It can be inferred that it's important how families evaluate the degree of the difficulty for some issues they face and this may be linked to how they cope with these difficulties and to their family strength and resilience. The same family emphasized the importance of patience when dealing with their foster child:

M3: "We didn't have any difficulties either in the orientation or after he came home, I mean we got along very well and we still do."

F3: "In some families, they don't fit well with the kid, we've heard it. Some friends have given their kids back, those who didn't fit well. I didn't have such a thing."

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M3: "And it needs a little patience. And why is that? Because, after all, so many kids are all together there (referring to the dormitory in Bahçelievler). When we have guests over here, two or three kids get together, and believe me it gets noisy at home. So many kids are all together there, so it's so normal for them to be active… and Bahçelievler has an open area. There are chickens, there are trees there, and the kids run there until evening. It's very normal for them to be active. But it needs patience."

F3: "Of course, you can't deal with the kid without it anyway."

Although the foster children had joined their home later from the institution, the parents have information to some degree about the children's lives during and before their stay in the institution. With this knowledge, all participant parents understand and empathize with why their foster children behave in that way. It's not just because of having this knowledge, but they also have the parental skill to show empathy for the children's feelings.

The following parents explained that they have had difficulties with their foster child, but they got used to this situation over time. It is also seen that they have tried to understand the child and accept her as she is after spending some time with her:

M4: "Things got much easier after the babysitter came. Because I couldn't go out. She wouldn't stop anywhere, I went to my mother's house, and it was same there...The kid was very right, because she had not seen anything before (while she stayed in the institution). And when we said, 'don't do it', she would never understand it. She still never understands it already. Not at all, zero. But I guess now we got used to her not listening." (laughs)

The same parents also stated:

M4: "There is not much difficulty now...Our first kid was very calm, and our second kid is active. You know, that's what I think now. I don't have that much difficulty now."

F4: "Even for almost everyone, their kids are different from each other. I mean, the first kids are calm, the second kids are active."

M4: "Oh, yes."

As another mother and father told about the first days of the orientation, it was seen that they could both show empathy for their foster child's behaviors even on those first days:

M3: "Emre never approached me...and he didn't even talk to me. He was even playing with my daughter and son, but he was telling me to go away and sit there. And why is that? That's his reaction to the mothers, you know, he's always been left."

F3: "So, that's insecurity."

M3: "That's insecurity. That's why he didn't want to get attached to me. It was like, what if I leave him too, what if I keep seeing him and then I don't see him anymore. After that, I started to go there alone…I thought, I guess I'll have a dialogue with him if I go alone. After that, all worked well. Then I went there alone all the time, and in that way, there was a bonding built between us."

Another mother talked about her observations of her foster child on the orientation week and she seemed she could understand why her foster child had behaved in that way:

M2: "Well, of course it was a difficult week, because it was the first time that he spent time with me outside of the area where he lived, and I was a stranger for him. He always wanted to go out of the playing area. It was very difficult to keep him inside there. He didn't like closed doors at all, and we always had to go outside, mostly to the garden. He always wanted to go further, so he wasn't stopping, he was wondering. Because, for the first time he had such an opportunity, and he tried to push it further, and I always had to run after him…When I tried to put limits on him, for example that we wouldn't be able to go out because it was a rainy day, he was just telling me to go away, which meant don't stop me. He was enjoying playing very much, but his reactions could suddenly change since I was still not a safe person for him...The first three days passed like this...So there were times that changed instantly."

The following mother could also empathize with her foster daughter:

M4: "Now we bought bunk beds for the girls, they are now sleeping in the same room with bunk beds. But after a short time, we already combined their rooms. We had

started with separate rooms. But then the babysitter came…But we already thought later that it was a wrong idea for them to have separate rooms. Because the kid has already grown up in a room with sixteen kids. It didn't mean anything to Ayşe at once when we said it's your room. It means something to her now. Now the kid has learned what means mine. She didn't know at that time and she was feeling alone in her room. She's felt good about the room she shares with Müge."

3.4.6. Seeing the Positives in the Child

Although the parents have had some difficulties with their foster children, on the other hand, they could see the positive or fun aspects of them which they have enjoyed. Thus, it may have been easier for the parents to show the children tolerance because of their bringing some joy to their lives and spending good times together.

A mother and father who were challenged by their foster child's behaviors of being very active, stubborn and not listening to them, mentioned about the positive and fun aspects of the child:

F4: "We talk about her as a naughty kid now, but on the other hand she's actually such a kid with so much love."

M4: "She's very cute. There's no one who has seen her and has not liked her till now. She gives a blue bead to everyone..."

F4: "And she's a fun kid when she doesn't cry."

In another family, while the child had brought home a habit from the dormitory related to eating that was different from the family's table manners, on the other hand, his tidiness he had also gained there made things easy for this family: "He has been a very tidy boy since he came. His toilet training or keeping his clothes neatly after taking them off, he's a very tidy boy. That's why there was no difficulty for us." (M3)

The following parents who had to deal with their foster child's slowly and little eating, and her characteristics of being very active and stubborn, also expressed that the child has brought joy and fun to their home:

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M6: "We're always like this at home, Esra dances and keeps jumping up with her brother. She says, 'Brother, play this, play that (music video).' or 'Brother, let's play together with these games.' They're so funny, it's really funny to watch them."

F6: "And we listen to this music in the car, too." (smiles)

M6: "Esra goes crazy there (laughs). We're having fun, we're really having fun."

3.4.7. Sense of Humor

This is a personal characteristic that was found in some of the participants interviewed, and it's about taking a humorous perspective on challenging events or problematic issues which occurred in the past or continue to be an issue and thereby helps to soften the hardness of the issue. The participants probably had not approached the events in the past in that much humorous way while experiencing these difficulties, but this personal feature still may have had a facilitating effect in general for families when dealing with the difficulties by increasing family resilience. In some instances, some of the participants perceived their child's some behaviors as unexpected from him and found them humorous. Similarly, some couples were making jokes about or teasing their partner, which gave an impression that they were emotionally close and enjoying each other's company, again which may have had a positive effect on family resilience.

A mother and father described the difficulty they experienced in the first days in a humorous way:

M5: "He came home, entered through the door and did not stop at all. He was in such an action, he was climbing up on the table, climbing up on the kitchen counter, he was terrific, he was like a battery-operated doll. Then I said, oh, what are we going to do now, how are we going to follow him?" (laughs)

F5: "He was leaving his smell everywhere…" (laughs)

M5: "But everywhere…(laughs)…We couldn't catch up with him (laughs), he was opening the drawers, pulling them down, and taking down whatever was in it, he was so active. I said, oh my God…And our kids were quite calm, so when we went

somewhere as a guest, we would sit there with the kids. He was a type of kid that we were not used to, he was very active. He was climbing up on the kitchen counter and taking whatever was in the drawer, knives and everything. It was very dangerous for him. He was such an active kid, and it worried us a lot. We always had our eyes on him, I mean all four of us."

The same parents told that they would leave the decision of choice to their foster child when he grows up, about whether he will stay with them in the future or go to his biological family. On the other hand, they were worried that if he lived with his own family, he might not have a good life there. While they were talking about this issue during the interview, at some point they had a humorous approach on this issue which in fact was something they were concerned about:

F5: "We have concerns about the future, I mean concerns about his preferences, that is, whether he's going to have a positive or a negative life, just that, and nothing else. Now the kid's ideal is to be a police officer. He says that he's going to be a police officer. We don't direct him in any way. He wants to be a police officer. So, let's say this boy becomes a police officer in the future. Well, his family…his uncle, and so on..."

M5: "It would be a little difficult."

F5: "These people are a little troubled."

M5: (laughs) "So if he became a police officer, he would have to catch them first."

F5: (laughs) "They wouldn't appear to him, he'd go after them."

M5: "Now we say that the best thing for him is not to be a police officer." (laughs)

F5: "He could be a pharmacist (laughs)…So, we don't have any other concerns. It's just about the future. So, we don't know if we'll see those days, but of course we are still together with him in this process, and we have concerns about his future."

In another family, a habit of their foster child that he had caught at the dormitory and brought to his foster home in the early days was considered as funny by the foster parents:

M3: "Do you remember that he had this thing? (laughs) That was so funny, for example, when a guest came to our house, and we were drinking tea with that cup."

F3: "Yes."

M3: "That was very sweet. He would stand here, and as soon as the tea in the cups was finished, then he would pick up those cups and take them to the kitchen." (They both laugh.) He wouldn't leave any cups and plates in front of anybody. I don't know why he was doing it."

F3: "I think because they had the habit of tidying up everything there (referring to the dormitory)."

In the part of the interview where these foster parents were asked how foster care has affected their couple relationship, they both said that it did not affect their relationship in any way, but just in the beginning of this part the father made this comment, which implied that what he said might be half-joke and half-serious. Looking at his wife, he said, "No, it didn't effect. Just that you care more about him (referring to their foster child) than me." (laughs) (F3) and then he also said that this was a joke.

Another couple was also making jokes and teasing each other and the father was even teasing himself. In some point during the interview, this couple talked about the possibility of their foster child to be taken by her biological mother soon, and they had feelings of anxiety, sadness, and uncertainty relating to this possibility. The father is a retired engineer and he and his wife both said that he was a man with "an engineer head". The father implied that he didn't usually get emotional, but it was different today. Towards the end of the interview, they said:

F6: "I said some very emotional words today."

M6: "Yes. So, having an engineer head, you're now in retirement mode, in my mode." (laughs)

F6: "Oh yes :-) I've a little switched to grandfather mode. I'm somewhere between a father and a grandfather."

A foster father was talking about his feelings for his foster son and at that point he got emotional and was almost crying. Then his wife laughed and said that her

husband was a very sensitive person. Her laughing might be related to socially expected behaviors for men from their wives, but her response at that point might also be working as easing the difficulty of an issue that was hard to talk about:

F3: "It's like, you know, there is something different about him. It's something different which is hard to tell. It's a very different thing. You know you feel like almost crying when you are involved in it. I really feel emotional even now." (His eyes get full of tears, almost crying.)

M3: "He's so emotional. He cries even when he watches a TV series." (laughing)

Another couple was telling about the first day they met their foster child and at that moment the father got very emotional and his eyes were full of tears. The father needed to take a short break and left the room. At that point, the mother laughed at her husband but she was in fact aware of the hardness of the subject being spoken.

M5: "We had him (Ahmet) circumcised. He (the father) also cried back then. Well, I can hold my tears to a point but he cannot do it at all (laughs and then sighs). So, it's hard, you know…"

Then the father came back but he kept silent in the conversation for a few minutes. While she was laughing, the mother said to her husband with a warm voice:

M5: "It's not possible to continue without you. We are waiting for you…"

F5: "You may continue if you'd like…I don't know, I suppose…"

M5: "We've got old." (laughing)

F5: "We are old now." (laughing)

They were implying that they got emotional because they have got old. At some point further in the interview, the same mother stated her opinion about how the interview was and teased her husband since he got emotional in the beginning:

M5: "It was fine, fine. It wasn't very hard. But it's a little hard for you." (telling her husband and laughing).

3.5. TRANSFORMATION

3.5.1. Transformation of the Foster Family

After the arrival of a foster child, all family members were affected in various ways in their interactions with the child. Having a new child at home has not only influenced each family member, but also the relationships between family members have changed, thereby affecting the family as whole, transforming the families. However, this transformation happened while protecting the core family values, family culture and structure, and biological children.

3.5.1.1. Being More Connected as a Family

Foster children have positively affected the families by bringing the whole family more together, so they have started spending more time together with a more variety of activities or by getting around the city more. Family activities have changed as well to suit the child.

The following parents explained the change in the family after the child's arrival:

F5: "In fact, this is what happened, thanks to Ahmet we started to get around the city a lot. Before, we were using the public transport, and we could only go to places where public transportation took us. Now that Ahmet has been coming with us, we couldn't get on public transport much. It became a problem. So, it impelled us to buy a car. When we bought a car, we started to get around... (They both laugh) ...I mean, now we're like...where are we going to this week, let's go to a social facility with a park..."

M5: "And we've preferred places that are suitable for him..."

F5: "Suitable for Ahmet. And what can we do there that suits us, I mean we're setting goals for ourselves. It's somewhat because of Ahmet."

Although another mother said that she sometimes felt she had neglected her husband and biological daughter after becoming a foster parent, her husband said that

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he didn't agree with her and that their foster child has in fact made a positive contribution to their family, and then his wife agreed with him on this point:

M2: "…So I think I neglected them."

F2: "No, after all, well...we're still spending time together. I think it even helped something. Sude began to spend time with us." (smiles)

M2: "Yes, Sude began to spend time with us. That's right."

F2: "Before, she was going to her room, she was on the phone, on the computer and so on...Now she comes down stairs to spend time with Ozan."

M2: "Yes, he made a positive contribution in that sense. Because Sude figured it out, she couldn't see us, but now she's having a shared time with us so she must have thought I'd do it like this." (laughs)

F2: "She comes to spend time with Ozan and we all spend time together, so I think it even helped."

Some families also said that a new child's joining in the family has brought joy to their family, the energy has increased at home and they have had a more pleasant time together. One family said the following:

M3: "Emre has brought joy to our home. That's the truth."

F3: "When he's not here, it's quiet in here. It's like this. Everybody gets silent."

M3: "If he were around now, he would run here, he would come and hang around with us. He is definitely the joy of our home. So, as I said, he has brought joy to our home, and there is another child now we care about. I can say he's the joy of our home. He's the little kid of our home now."

Another family stated the following:

F6: "Well, normally we were…when Esra was not here…Arzu, I and Tunç were just sitting in here. Everyone was like…one was holding a phone, another one was on the computer or on the Ipad, watching TV, like a traditional Turkish family…or I was reading a book. After Esra came home, there's been always some action at home."

M6: "Our energy levels have also increased."

F6: "She doesn't play by herself. She always wants someone to play with. Eighty percent of the time she plays with us."

M6: "Sure, our games are always here. She wants to play a box game, she's like let's play this and that."

F6: "And it's not in her room, the games are always played in the living room."

M6: "Because she is trying to include me and his father in the games. So, this is our living space."

In fact, it is seen that all families care about and do the activities that the foster children like, either as the whole family or in pairs, the foster child and one parent. While the families enjoy doing these activities together with the foster children, they also make much effort and give their time in taking care of them.

Some parents thought that after becoming a foster family, their relationship as a couple has not changed much or not been affected in any way, and some other parents thought that it has been affected positively since they have shared a new experience of being a foster family and have strived in this together. A mother talked about how being a foster family affected her relationship with her husband positively: "Of course, since we have been sharing more things, it has affected us more positively. So, our family life is positive, too. Because the number of things we share is growing. We're striving and struggling for something together." (M1)

A father talked about how being a foster family affected his relationship with his wife, and he also mentioned what it meant for them to be a foster family, and that they went through a challenging stage together as whole family by holding on to their family values:

F5: "We didn't have anything happen in a negative sense, it has been in a positive sense. I mean at least...taking a test...We took a test, the test of mercy, I mean how we are doing on these issues. So, we got through it well. I mean, how we were on these issues, we've lived this. That's how we got through it. For us, they too (referring to his biological children) passed this test, that nice test. So, they too are in good state for us. So, it has never shaken our relationship in any negative sense. Of course, from

time to time they make sacrifices, for example they don't go out anywhere, and these are plus for us. So, they're appreciated."

As for a negative opinion, when they were asked how being a foster family affected their relationship with the spouse, only one mother (M2) said that she could not spare enough time for her husband and felt like she had neglected him after being a foster family. Despite her opinion, her husband did not agree with her and talked in a way that was empathic and supportive towards her:

M2: "I was falling asleep too as soon as Ozan fell asleep, so we couldn't spend much time (with my husband). When Ozan was sleeping at 10:30 at night, I was too falling asleep at 11 at night (laughs)…and we would also wake up frequently during nights. So, for this reason we couldn't spend much time together (with my husband) for some period."

F2: "I think there is no such nothing as very negative. After all, of course, you get tired all day together with him (Ozan)…You are getting up at the same time with Ozan. So, that's normal."

M2: "I felt that way, so I had always thought that I neglected you."

F2: "No, after all, there is no such thing. As I said, this process is normal. I mean, of course, you are more taking care of him at nights, and you get tired, so of course that's normal."

3.5.1.2. Sibling Effect

There were examples of having a foster child at home affecting the biological children positively and changing the relationships between family members in a positive way as well. A foster mother and father talked about the positive change in their biological daughter after the foster child's inclusion in the family. They stated:

M2: "Sude has matured."

F2: "She's matured, she's matured."

M2: "She has become more sensible."

F2: "She tried to be a sister or became a sister..."

M2: "Elder sister..."

F2: "In that sense, it was positive for Sude, too."

The same parents also mentioned about how the arrival of their foster child has positively affected their relationship with their daughter who is their only biological child:

M2: "It contributed more seriously to Sude than us...it has matured her seriously because now she is actually in adolescence and... two years ago, we were in a period of serious conflicts with her...So, it's been very good for her. It's been very good for our relationship with her as well. At least we don't force each other too much anymore... It was partly because of me since my only focus was Sude and I was trying to direct her too much...Now she has been left an easy space…With that effect, our relationship with her has become better."

F2: "Sude was relieved, and we were relieved, too." (laughs)

The following parents who have two biological children also mentioned about the positive effect on their son, implying his manners and behaviors were changed in a better way after the inclusion of another child in the family:

M5: "So, in fact, the youngest one in our family was our son. But after Ahmet came, Mert has been in the position of the elder brother and he wasn't the youngest one in the family anymore."

F5: "Maybe our real son has been in a better state because he likes that Ahmet calls him elder brother. Our daughter already has a younger brother, and he calls her as elder sister."

M5: "But now our son has become an elder brother."

F5: "When he became the elder brother, that was better."

Another father said that her biological daughter, who was an only child, was staying in her own room previously and that she didn't like sharing her room and some of her belongings with the foster child after she came come, but from his point of view he considered this change in fact as a positive thing: "Before we were raising her in

cotton wool, so I think it's been an experience for her that may prepare her better for life, so that's been good." (F4)

There are sometimes conflicts, arguments and quarrels between the biological children and the foster children, and in almost all families interviewed, this is related to the desire of the biological children to set limits for the foster children such as not entering their rooms without permission, and on the other side disobedience of the foster children. As other underlying reasons, some families with an only child also mentioned about their biological child's feelings of jealousy towards their foster child, and the foster child's feelings of jealousy and rivalry towards their biological child. Despite these, there is also much love and a sibling bond between the biological and foster children, and they see each other as siblings. The biological children also want to protect the foster children from any harm. There is also more responsibility taken for the foster child by the biological children who are in their teens or older because of the age gap between them. For all these reasons, the interviewed parents see their relationship as a typical sibling relationship.

3.5.1.3. Reallocating Time, Attention and Energy for the Children

In foster families who have only one biological child, after the addition of a new child, the parents have tried to keep the balance between the biological child and the foster child in giving them time and making the effort to care. Some mothers have sometimes felt a sense of neglect towards their biological child while wanting to take care of that child and at the same time trying to cope with the difficulties of living with their foster child. In order for the biological child not to be adversely affected or get jealous, the parents were particularly careful about giving time, attention and energy to both children, and in some families, that was divided into two. For example, in one family, taking care of the biological son has been mostly on the mother now, while for the foster girl it has been mostly on the father. In another family, by time it has spontaneously turned into a way of sharing specific daily tasks and activities that they do with their foster child, between the mother and the father.

A father said the following:

F1: "How did it affect us as a father and son? …Of course, since Nehir is little, I may sometimes have to spend more time with her, so sometimes Ege can reproach me like, 'Dad, are you again taking care of her things?'…but we always try to balance it. We always try to spare the necessary time for him as well, so it's a sensitive issue that we always care about. To spare equal time and equal effort on both children."

A mother who thought that she had neglected her biological daughter stated:

M2: "Sude and I have been away from the things we did together. For example, she likes to go shopping. One day we went to shopping with Ozan. That day we couldn't even look around for anything, because Ozan was running around all the time and we were after him. Sude asked me if it was always going to be like this from then on. I said, 'Time Sude, over time everything will settle. Now he's very curious and we need to adapt to him, but I will spare time for you too and I will do my best.' We try to go shopping whenever possible, but because of Ozan we can't do it much… Sude accepted the situation."

Another father shared how he tried to keep the balance between the two children in terms of his relationship with them and for sparing time for both children:

F6: "Well, when one of the children gets angry with the other one, I try not to take sides…but when I take Esra's side unwillingly since she is a little younger, then Tunç sometimes gets upset a little bit."

He also said the following:

F6: "…So we did not want that anything was left he wanted to do but couldn't do because of Esra. That's why I take Esra to training in the weekend mornings and I take Tunç there in the evenings. It's the same routine for both Saturday and Sunday. I'm not telling them for example, I'm only taking Esra with me, you come and you stay. Well, maybe we did not live a big problem since we were able to manage that process well."

3.5.2. Transformation of the Child: "What a Happiness for Us"

3.5.2.1. Adaptation to Family Structure and Culture

In all families, the foster children have started to adapt to the family structure and culture by time, which was expected from them. The rules and limits set by the parents were part of it as well and the children have mostly adapted to them.

A mother shared that their foster child's eating habits that he had acquired at the dormitory were changed by warning him to follow the table manners at home and by the child's adaptation to these rules by time:

M3: "He had that eating fast, but since we eat at the same table and at the same time, he got used to it by himself over time, and we also said, 'Eat slowly and don't start eating until everyone sits at the table.' We told him so, and he got used to it by himself. Actually, as a child grows up in a family, he modifies them (habits) spontaneously and by himself. You know, by seeing it, observing it, living it, he modifies them."

A mother and father talked about how they made effort to set rules for their foster child and by time he adapted to them:

F2: "Of course, we made an effort, too. Explaining things to him or persuading him…"

M2: "Of course, we were always trying to make suggestions. At the age of two and half, the rules were set."

F2: "Of course he got used to it, too."

M2: "The rules were set, they were partially set."

A mother gave an example of how they wanted to instill in their foster child their family culture and value judgements by making her learn them:

M6: "…For example, she wanted a bicycle. We were going to buy a bicycle anyway, but we tried to raise awareness in her that we need to save up money for it. She saved up her money last year, and we told her, 'Oh well, then we can buy a bicycle now.' We were already going to buy it, but we wanted to raise that awareness in her, so

that she could learn it. That's how Tunç grew up too. We did this so she could learn that she must do something for it and we bought it. Now she has saved up money again, this time for the Scooter."

For another family having a good education and learning a second language were important as part of their family culture and they were proud of the success of their foster daughter, who seemed to adapt to it:

F4: "…Her English is so well."

M4: "Her English, yes. She has answered the questions (during the interview at school) in English. We only have Netflix on TV. Everything the children watch is in English. That's why she is doing very well with her English. She is much too young, but it's great...Actually the school has accepted her because they saw her and talked to her."

3.5.2.2. Positive Changes in Physical and Psychological Well-being

After the children came to the foster homes from the institution, they have improved their physical condition, and they have also had positive changes in their psychological state or symptoms with the support of the families. When the parents were talking on this subject, they seemed to be emotionally satisfied, feeling pleased and having peace of mind because of these improvements in the children, which was understood directly from their words and indirectly from their voice tones.

The following parents were concerned about their foster child's physical condition when she first came home. They took the effort to heal her, and they were relieved when that happened:

M1: "They made her lie in bed constantly in the nursery. In fact, normally a 6-month-old baby should not be lain like that. Of course, we were somewhat worried about it, you know...because of her disorder, because of what she's been through."

F1: "She was unable to sit upright, she was toppling over. We were holding her, and supporting her with pillows from her right and left."

M1: "So, of course we were somewhat worried in those early months."

F1: "We thought it might be a neurological or a spinal cord problem. We were a little afraid."

M1: "You know, we were told that there might be a problem with the spinal cord, so they said it would come out by time. But later she started to sit after a while. At the end of a year, the neurologist who saw her told us, 'This is a super developed kid.' They said, 'We cannot believe that she's now in this state, looking at what's written on her record. It's been a great development, as if we're not talking about the same kid.' And then we didn't take her to the doctor anymore, I mean she recovered. Now she's a very healthy and a very smart girl."

Another mother and father were feeling happy because of the improvements they have seen in their foster child who had autism behaviors during his stay at the institution and which continued for a while after he came to their home:

M5: "They visited us from METU...They were doing research about children with the onset of autism. They had already seen it with him. Later they came about four times to follow up on what changes would happen with him after he began to live with foster family…For example, he was shutting himself down...He wouldn't want to hear...And he would lie down on the floor and keep spreading his legs open and close. Then he would move forth and back on his forehead by rubbing it on the floor, and he would keep moving like that. He had things like that. Then they came from METU, but he had gotten over it, he didn't do these things anymore."

F5: "But to touch a kid is a good thing, I mean it makes us happy to save him from that condition, from that position. Because when he came here, he was rubbing his head and so on, I mean he was really in a bad state."

M5: "And we heard that many of the kids staying out there (at the institution) already have the autism. I mean, if we've been at least useful even for something like that, what a happiness for us, right?"

Stated by the foster parents, there were other psychological improvements of the children after staying for some time in foster homes, such as starting to give reactions after some time while they were unresponsive to stimuli when they first came

home; becoming cheerful and much willing to communicate with people around them when they were known to be communicating little at the dormitory; and stopping some symptoms such as thumb sucking or plucking skin on the face.

3.5.2.3. Overcoming Some of the Anxieties and Fears

As mentioned before, in most families, after coming to foster homes, the children had the anxiety and fear of being sent back to the institution, but it was overcome by time as the children naturally realized that it didn't happen since they continued to live with their foster families who were always present.

This mother and father shared what they experienced related to this subject:

M3: "When we were going out, he feared that we were taking him to the nursery. He had this fear a lot. We registered him to the kindergarten for the first time, and he was going to take the school shuttle, but he didn't want to do that. He was thinking that he was going to go to the nursery. It took some time to get over that, him getting used to it. He had the same fear every time."

F3: "I think he had it every time he left home during that period. He was nervous, he was thinking like, they took me in the first place, but they are taking me back to the institution. He was very reactive when he was the only one with me when we were going somewhere by car. He even cried in the first time. But after doing this two or three times, he understood he was going and coming back home and then already…"

M3: "Well he's like a wind now…He had no more fears later."

As mentioned before, some children had also brought to foster homes from the dormitory their fears that the food could be taken away from them while eating and would not be available whenever they wanted, and their related behavior of eating too fast and too much food. This behavior was not only changed by the parents' teaching the children table manners, but also by the children's overcoming their fears with a sense of trust that the food would be in front of them at home whenever they asked for it. This father explained:

F3: "And there is also another thing...For example, we put food in front of him, and when he asks for it again we give him more, and then it is already automatically...He knows that he gets hungry and that he'll get food in front of him. He says, 'Mom, I'm hungry', and we give him food. He eats and he's full, he knows that the pot is there, and there is food in it."

Although the children have overcome their anxieties and fears of being left and sent back to the institution and those fears related to meal times, which they had for a while after coming to foster homes, the anxiety and fear related to biological family visits with the possibility of being taken back by them and leaving their foster families remains an issue. This point will be explained in the following subtheme.

3.5.2.4. Transition to a More Secure Relationship with the Parents' Emotional Support

The foster children have seen a major change in their lives from staying at the dormitory of the institution with a group of many children and many caregivers to coming to a warm family home where they have been receiving individual care, attention and love. So, they have experienced a transition from having short-term interactions with multiple caregivers to building a more secure child-parent relationship with one mother and father. By time, the children have got used to, accepted, embraced, loved and bonded with their foster families and the houses they have been living in.

It is understood that all interviewed foster fathers and mothers are attentive and responsive to their foster child's needs and feelings. Moreover, there were examples of the containment of the children's emotions, especially in the statements of foster mothers. Therefore, the foster mothers seem to be a primary source of emotional support for the children when they get stressed, anxious or angry. Receiving caring, attention, empathy and emotional support strengthen the children's trust in their foster parents and make them feel secure.

While this mother was talking about her relationship with the child, her husband made a clear and short comment about her words:

M3: "He has bonded with me more now. More than all others in the family (laughing). You know he didn't want me at first. Now he comes to me right away and seeks comfort from me for everything. If I'm watching TV then he comes and hugs me, kisses me and leaves."

F3: "As they say, 'mother'."

Another mother and father said the following:

M2: "I show my love by hugging him. I like kissing him very much from here (his neck) and then I give him a hug. I do it very often. Even when he gets angry with me I touch and hug him."

F2: "At first he liked his head being caressed. He would sometimes come to me and ask to caress his head."

M2: "But he also says, 'I love you' now, I mean he expresses this verbally. He comes and leans his head like that."

F2: "He hugs me."

M2: "He hugs me too. Ozan has no problem with expressing his feelings. Like his anger or fear, well…we can understand his emotions clearly from his expressions."

Another important point is that the children with recurring biological family visits seem to be experiencing anxiety and fear of separation from their foster parents, based on the anxiety and stress the children are having before and during these visits, and the symptoms and changes in their behaviors after these visits, which were observed by the foster parents. Thus, confronting these visits might be causing an adverse effect on the children's sense of security. However, according to the statements by some foster parents, the children experience recovery in their behaviors and symptoms after some time has passed from the visits and as they continue to stay in their foster homes. The foster parents seem to be helping the children ease their worries, anxieties and stress related to the visits as well, by continuing to be present, showing empathy and caring, giving emotional support and containing their feelings.

A father and mother shared the distress of their foster child before and on the days when his biological family came to the institution to see him. They told that the child always wanted his foster mother with him whom he perceived as a source of emotional support whenever he met his biological family. The mother also said that she prepared him in advance by talking to him before those days:

M5: "…I prepare him two days, three days in advance. 'Look, son, you will go to see…mother, your sister will come, your bother will come, you can play with them.' He starts at that moment saying, 'You will come too, you will come too.' I say, 'Ok, I will come too'."

F5: "On the days when he sees his biological mother, he wants my wife with him."

M5: "He gets very nervous, very stressful..."

F5: "So they go upstairs together, with my wife. The social worker tells them to go upstairs together. That's how he meets his mother..."

M5: "Because otherwise he doesn't go upstairs."

F5: "We enter the building, and as soon as we get inside, he runs and jumps on our laps."

M5: "He doesn't want to get into the elevator."

F5: "I mean, he's afraid. The elevator seems like a bad thing to him. I mean, he recognizes everything there. So, the kid is going through very bad things there."

Similarly, another couple talked about their observations of their foster daughter as follows:

F6: "After seeing her biological mother, about two or three days or even about a week…"

M6: "Esra cannot pull herself together for about a week."

F6: "And she's same at the school."

M6: "She comes and hugs us, but she says, 'I will miss you very much'. So, the kid has faltered there. We complained about her biological mother (to the Foster Care Unit), and then she was no more giving any stimulus to Esra. After that, Esra stopped

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eating her nails. When we thought that she got over it, two months ago, her mother has shown her the pictures of the rooms of her rental house, and she has told her things like 'This is our house'. Then in the last month's visit, her mother has shown her the beds she bought for that house. When she receives these stimuli before things get serious, that's what happens to her…So, after her mother's visits, Esra hugs us more…but she gives us a hard time, too. She also gets tense and when we hug her we sense it in her very much that I try to hug her more so that her tenseness doesn't last too long…We sense it, so actually it's not something that can be explained."

The interviewed parents said that their foster children express their love by showing affection to them, by hugging, kissing, running towards them, meeting them at the door when they arrive home, and by saying words of love. It is seen that all parents are pleased and experience emotional satisfaction because of receiving love from the children. In fact, in two families, the parents said that their foster daughter was more affectionate or more openly showed her love to them in a way that they didn't see it from their biological child. In all families, even though foster care brings some difficulties, loving their foster child very much and receiving love from the child in return may be motivating the parents more to deal with the difficulties and continue fostering. In fact, it can be generally said that the transformation of the foster family and the transformation of the foster child is a cyclical process in which either of them constantly affects the other.

3.6. ANXIETY RELATED TO THE CHILD'S FUTURE

3.6.1. Living with Ambiguity: What if S/he Leaves?

Only one foster family considers the child's returning to his biological mother and siblings as a better option for him provided that the mother's life standards improve and she requests to take her child back. Apart from that example, all other families want their foster child to stay with them in the future and become their permanent family. They have specific dreams about the child in the future. Even if the child is taken back

by the biological family, all foster families want to continue their relationship with the child and always support and help him/her continuously for the least.

There are some families who consider adopting their foster child. However, there is legal uncertainty on this issue, since many families have indicated that the status of being adoptable does not exist for the child yet. Even though the child's status becomes adoptable and the foster family makes a request, some families mentioned that there is a possibility for taking the child back and giving him/her to another family who has been waiting in line for adoption. In contrast, another family stated that the state legal regulations are updated on this matter and this has changed. But other families were not aware of this possible situation. On the other hand, another family said that they would wait for the child to grow up a little more before applying for adoption, since they could not be sure for the final decision that will be made by the court.

In addition, foster families continue to live with the possibility that the children may be taken back by their biological families anytime. While biological fathers never come to the institution on the visit days to see the children, four of the biological mothers come to see the children even they do it on an irregular basis. If they can improve their conditions and the state approves, then they may take the children back. A notable point in this subject is that the foster families always live with the possibility of the children's leave and at the same time they continue with their ordinary life due to the uncertainty on this issue. Besides, they have also plans for the children's future. This situation causes a great anxiety in almost all families. A mother and father stated the following:

M2: "We want to see our grandchildren with him and in fact this was our dream. But our motivation has been broken a little, even though we ignored and disregarded it…"

F2: "Saying our motivation has been broken may be a wrong expression…well…I mean we were uneasy about this…"

M2: "It was affecting our plans for the future."

F2: "But, well…the biological mother again did not call the institution, she only came to visit Ozan once in three months…It was September and October…but no application. Again, in New Year's Day, this time she came up with another plan…and she will take him back at the end of this year, as she says supposedly."

M2: "Now she is planning to take him for next year around September or October. She always has a schedule ahead on her mind."

F2: "Sure, that's something related to the future…there is something we want to do…but on the other side there is also this thing on our minds (his voice sounds anxious as he talks) …The mother mostly does not even come for a visit, but she thinks about taking him back…this process may take…I don't know, maybe around two or three years, but eventually she may take him back. But in the meantime, it will be a tough period. Also, you may endure this situation if it has been a regular request, but it is not. I mean she doesn't see him at all for three months, she changes her mind and then never calls. I think one time it was nearly five months. Then she suddenly shows up and comes to see Ozan…I mean there are no regular visits."

M2: "You are planning something permanent…but there is a reality that distracts you."

Similarly, while this mother and father have plans for both their own and foster child, on the other hand there is always uncertainty related to their foster child's separation from them:

F4: "…To be honest, what we think for Ayşe is the same as what we think for Müge. We don't know what the life will bring to us…but for now they have schools, so they will be educated and keep growing. We will try to provide them a good future as much as we can. Well…but we don't know what will happen…there's uncertainty about whether they will take the child back or not."

M4: "Because you cannot really think about another dream with a certainty...Ok, we also don't know what is going to happen to our own child, but about Ayşe…there is always a family there, and the institution is always in favor of the child goes to her family."

3.6.2. It's So Hard to Leave the Child

In a situation where there is always a possibility of the biological family's taking the child back, there is also the difficulty associated with separating from the child since the foster families become attached to the child. Related to this difficulty, the foster families currently have feelings such as worry, anxiety, uneasiness, sadness, fear and disappointment. The same parents who feel anxiety and uneasiness due to this uncertainty, mentioned that separation from the child would be very hard both for them and the child:

F2: "…And this process, well…it had to be done when it was first pronounced …it had to be over by September or October…They should have taken the child back at that time if they were really planning for it. Because that period wasn't like this yet, and we…"

M2: "It's already too late now."

F2: "It would have been hard both for us and Ozan, but it would not have been that hard as we are going through now."

During the beginning of the interview, another mother, while she was crying, explained that they were devastated with the news they heard today:

M6: "We were devastated by some news just today, it was like a punch on the face. Esra's mother wants to take her back, and we heard that she is serious. Now she really wants her back. I said ok, our purpose has been apparent for years…"

F6: "But we didn't expect it to happen so quickly."

M6: "Yes…well…you know, for example for my own child Tunç…it wasn't like I live for you, you are my…well, everything…I didn't do that. He will have his own life, go to school, and live his personal life. I also didn't do it that way for Esra. We love her a lot, but we didn't treat her like, we cannot stay away from each other. My mind is like that but you know, when things get serious, then it hurts (crying)… because we have been together for a year and three months."

These parents were also feeling anxiety and fear regarding the possibility of their foster child's separation from them:

F3: "…You take the child, you take care of him and bring him up to some point, but then your entire world is destroyed. For example, if the family shows up now and says, 'We will take this child back', or if they do have a court order. Then what will happen? You will see Ayşe (his wife) in a bad state. That's very bad."

M3: "…Now every foster family has this anxiety and fear. Because of this, we have had many friends among foster families that we always see. Almost all of them have this fear. What if the child leaves one day? They surely have this fear. Because you become attached, and you cannot already give love to that child at your home when there is no attachment."

F3: "That's not possible."

3.6.3. Who Knows What Awaits the Child if S/he Leaves

In addition to the anxiety associated with the possibility of the child's leave, the foster families also carry feelings of worry, anxiety, uneasiness, fear and sadness related to what the child will go through when s/he returns to his/her biological family. They are concerned about the child's future living conditions, whether s/he will receive any love, whether s/he will be safe or be neglected or exposed to violence again. Another concern is that the child will be known as an illegitimate child by other people in the new environment, and for this reason s/he will be very sad. Other issues of concern are that the child will not have the same standards of good education there, and will be deprived of having a room, toys, and nice outwear. The families don't want the child to be harmed neither physically nor psychologically. They feel responsibility for protecting the child not only when s/he is with them, but also after s/he leaves. As the families had the motivation to save a child and the related responsibility in the beginning, it is seen that they still carry similar thoughts and feelings about the child whom they see now as belonging to them.

A mother and a father expressed their feelings as follows:

M1: "We don't want her to be harmed."

F1: "Yes, that's our only concern."

M1: "Surely we both have the same concerns. We don't want her to be harmed, I mean in no way. Neither emotionally nor else…"

Another mother and father explained their anxiety as follows:

M6: "… (Our anxiety in the beginning) it was not that intense, like we feel now. Yes, you think it may happen, but when you start to face these events, then this time you begin to worry for the child's future..."

F6: "Well, the first anxiety…whether the child is going to feel comfortable or whether she is going to have healthy communications or relationships in the new environment she goes to…"

M6: "Is she going to be able to grow up healthily? For example, the mother will take her and she has already broken up with the father…Because I want the child to grow up without any disturbance…"

F6: "For instance, how will be the standards of her education?"

M6: "…We make a lot of effort and spend much time for her. You need to try a little hard so that the child doesn't get lost. If she goes back to her mother, I am worried about the mother's capability to sufficiently support her two children, and she has to work on the other hand. Is her elder sister going to have to act like a young mother again? But she is a child as well, she is 7 years old. So, this will be a tough mission for her (sighs). Ekin once told me, they were playing a laughing game with Esra, so they wouldn't hear the noises of their parents' fight…laughter in another room. They were laughing by tickling each other. Then the parents were beating them for making a lot of noise. Her elder sister told us about all this and I hope they don't go through the same things again…"

The following parents had fears and were feeling sad:

M2: "We are really very fearful about what Ozan will face if his mother takes him back. We are also really considering he may not find the same environment with full of love. That makes us very upset (her voice sounds very sad).

These parents were also concerned about whom the child would live with, whether he would be safe or not, and whether he would be experiencing any abuse or violence if he is given to his biological mother:

F2: "…The ongoing story is…she (biological mother) has a lover, she will get married to him and she will have her own house which will all take time. So, this is the story now."

M2: "What about the person she will get married to? …Well, we have been witnessing and hearing so many things…"

Another father shared his worries as well:

F4: "Now the family is, well…obviously, a poor family. There are a lot of kids. The father has some mental problems. We are not very rich people, but both children go to very good schools. So, she will be attending to one of Turkey's best schools. I hope I can make myself clear, well… after this school they will be sending her to an unknown school and with no love at home. She won't have the things she is used to. No room, no toys or no clothes. During April 23rd ceremony, her mother bought her some clothes and she was so happy with this. After getting used to these, it will be much harder for her to get used to their lack. And I can't make her lack of these here by considering that she may leave any day in the future."

3.6.4. Facing the Reality and Telling the Truth

Some children don't know who their real families are; and it is a difficult issue for the foster parents to explain to the children about their real families sooner or later and they are anxious about this. These parents stated:

F4: "She will ask about her baby pictures. Müge has her baby pictures in the album, but Ayşe's pictures don't exist."

M4: "Her pictures start from the age of two. She asks if this was our home, and I reply by saying 'No, this is the place we met', you know just to make her aware a little bit. Because then one day she may suddenly find out about this at the age of

six…and because her family doesn't see her. If her family had seen her, it could have been easier to explain. Because we have never had that."

In another foster family, differently, even though the child knows her real family, the foster parents are having difficulty in explaining the child about what she will be going through and what changes she will be having if she goes back to live with her real family:

F6: "…She says, 'I will be missing you guys a lot'…she doesn't know exactly what will happen. She keeps thinking that she will continue seeing us after she is gone. And we don't explain this to her."

M6: "We can't explain."

F6: "We can't…or she thinks…after she is gone…everything will proceed as they were…"

M6: "She thinks that she will continue attending to the same school."

F6: "…And she thinks that the only change will be that her sister will be with her. So, she possibly thinks nothing will change and it will be the same."

The difficulty of explaining to the child who the real family is or what the changes will be if the child goes to live with them, and the anxiety to face all these issues are related to the concerns of the foster parents about how the child will react when s/he finds these out and what s/he will go through. They are anxious because they think that when the child learns the truth or the biological family takes him/her back, the child will be upset, wear out or traumatized. Another concern is that since the child has got used to the foster family and has built a bonding with them, it will be very hard for him/her to leave the family and build a relationship with the biological family from start.

A mother and father had much anxiety related to the possibility of the biological mother's revealing to the child about her real family or telling her something wrong during the visits at an unplanned time. The mother said the following:

M1: "…Actually, after we explain the truth to her, it doesn't matter what they say. We are worried because she is very young…Telling her something wrong will definitely harm that child. It should be explained to her carefully in a sensitive way."

The following parents shared their concerns as well:

M2: "We didn't have any serious problems so far but it seems we will be having that from now on. We will probably be getting support during Ozan's confrontation with this."

F2: "Maybe it may not be that hard."

M2: "I don't know, maybe we can easily get over it. That's very unknown for us, so we don't know what expects us. How is Ozan going to react, what is ahead of us? I have been hearing from other foster families, and I know what difficulties they had during this process…There are families who have had great problems but there are also others who have gone through this more smoothly with no pain. We will try to have Ozan understand his position slowly. Besides that, we don't have any other difficulty."

The same mother also explained how difficult it would be for the child if he goes to live with his own family:

M2: "He has all of the family concept now. It will be very hard for him to rebuild that from scratch. That frightens us the most. Yes, surely the priority for him is to live with his own family and we signed the contract by knowing this. But on the other hand, this child got to know the family concept with us…And that's all settled now, he can give the names of his cousins, he can separate cousins with friends, and he is only three years old. He says this is my cousin or this is my friend, and he knows aunt and uncle notions. Is he going to start all over considering these circumstances? I mean, the bonding Ozan has built with us, and all neighbors…he is already the mascot in this complex. He would have to give up all these when he joins his own family. He will be remembering a lot from the past. And that will be a serious trauma for him."

Another mother and father had similar concerns about what the child would go through:

F4: "…The family can come and say anytime, 'We want our child, give us our child'. Well, the child's psychological balance is already sensitive, so this will be very upsetting for her."

M4: "She will wear out and so will we. It is not possible for her not to, she grows up knowing we are her family and suddenly she will find out something else. She will learn that everyone around her already knows about this. She will find out that her aunt and grandmothers are not real. That will be very disappointing for the child. Ayşe doesn't have any connection with a family that never sees her. She will be worn out because they take the child away suddenly just like that. They just tell you, 'We are taking her', and then they do it. They don't even give you a day. Consider this child goes through this. That's why I think this for her, not myself. I think about what she will go through. Müge will also wear out, but what we will go through will be nothing when compared to Ayşe's situation."

3.6.5. Wanting the Child Save Himself/ Herself and Be Strong

All families are aware of the significance of education. Among the parents, those who are well-educated and have also well-educated social networks, aim for a good education for their foster child as they would like to for their biological children. They want their foster child to have a good profession and future. Those foster parents with a lower level of education also want the child to get a good education and have a solid profession, for example they would like the child to become an official worker by benefiting from the rights the state provides. All these desires are part of their dreams for the child; but many families also consider it important that the child saves himself/herself and becomes a strong person who can self-support in the future. Of course, there is another concern behind all these; the child may leave them in the future and s/he should be self-sufficient and be able to secure his/her future.

A mother and father explained their goals and concerns for the child's future:

M3: "As a priority, we want him to have a profession that will sufficiently support him. That's why we are sending him to a good school…I'd like him to be useful

for himself and the society. Just that he saves himself and reaches a good position. That's what matters the most…"

F3: "My opinion is…to raise him and provide him with education so he gets to a good point with a nice profession…because there is no benefit from his own family as we see it."

Another father and mother had similar goals for their foster daughter:

F1: "We would like to raise her well, so she can be self-sufficient, as a well grown-up person. We want her to be well-educated, so she could be self-providing without a need for support from anybody, as a strong person. That's our objective or goal."

M1: "We want her to be self-supportive, do her job well whatever she does, be strong, not to be a woman who spends her time at home all day. I want her to be a woman who can struggle and achieve, that's what I would like, that she becomes a very strong woman."

There were other families too with similar concerns and goals, as follows:

F5: "…After he reaches a specific age, he can benefit from the opportunities the State has provided…To manage his own life…For example, it may be easier for him to be placed in a job."

M5: "Like an official job, you know, they have special rights and hopefully he can benefit from that."

F5: "These children have this advantage with no requirement for taking the KPSS exam. They have advantages like this…"

M5: "If he can save himself…at least he gets there. With no need for any support from anyone, when he becomes a person who can save himself and stand alone, that's our main goal. And that's also our expectation."

Another mother stated the following:

M4: "I wanted to raise her very properly, that's why I treat her differently than I do for Müge. I don't do anything for her at first, I let her do everything. Because her family can take her back anytime in the future. My only concern is to give many things

to Ayşe as much as I can. She needs to be strong. She already has an internal strength because of staying at the institution until she was two years old, and I am trying to improve that. This is the only thing I want because we know where she will go if she leaves one day…I mean, I don't think she will be in a similar environment like here."

3.7. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SYSTEM

3.7.1. Need for More Control, Follow-Up or Change in the System

The foster families talked about the need for more control for the related institutions and workers in the foster care system and they also indicated the requirement for making some changes within the system. For example, some families had some problems with the officers of the dormitories where their foster child's siblings live, and these problems occurred during they took the child to meet the biological family. A foster family was asked to meet the biological family at a place outside the institution building, which was against the rules. Another foster family was not informed by the dormitory officers that they would not be bringing the biological siblings to the visit which eventually led to the foster family's going to the meeting place in vain and disappointment of the foster child. It is apparently seen that there is a need for the monitoring of these dormitories considering that some foster children continue to be in touch with their own siblings and their foster families are influenced by these negative experiences.

A mother explained how she and her husband viewed the system and stated that they had concerns as a foster family:

M1: "…This points out lack of care. There is a wrong practice and no one has control mechanism. This is the biggest problem in this country. These children in those dormitories…that's why it is important to support the foster family. At least the foster families…well if you don't inspect, and if there is a lack of control mechanism then this is what happens. For example, simply speaking, not only for the foster families, but if the foster child has siblings and they are staying in the dormitories, then there is

a need for inspection for these children too. We are not saying this is a hundred percent true, but what we understand…there is an arbitrary practice. Who inspects or controls them? They say foundations, but which ones are they? How are these foundations being inspected? We don't know if they do this…Actually, our main concern is that the system must function properly. Not only for us, but for all families. If these institutions don't work out the system in a proper way, then life becomes difficult. And that's also the case for the foster family."

The same mother and her husband were concerned about that the biological family would reveal to the child that they are the real family, at an earlier time than planned. For this reason, they thought that biological family visits should always be overseen by an officer from the Foster Care Unit so the process could be kept under control in this way. The mother explained it as follows:

M1: "Because the people in the place which we call the institution, act in accordance with the rules. The workers in the institution are behaving properly. But it is not only the institution we relate to…Well, for example we are concerned with…You know, we especially want the institution to be with them during the visit, because a visit is held in the institution and the next visit is held in Bahçelievler…it takes turns like that. In that meeting in Bahçelievler, no one from the institution is being present. And we are not sure what they tell her are true or not, we do not even know what they tell her. We know that everything is under control when someone from the institution is present."

Many foster families indicated that they were pleased about the Foster Care Unit's visits to their homes for inspection. Because they think that inspection is good for all children; and since they are sensitive to other children's wellness as well, it makes them relieved knowing that other children's situations are also being investigated. They want the continuation of the system's feature in this sense. A mother said the following: "…It is better they continue home visits. I prefer that, this is good. Well…we know ourselves, but we can't be sure for others, so this is better." (laughing) (M5)

The following parents indicated that they expected home inspections to be done more often, even including themselves:

M3: "…Once I told our officer, our social worker, why don't you visit us? Just come and see the child. How is he doing? They said they knew the houses that should be visited, so they told us just to take it easy."

F3: "I was a little angry at them. I mean, I didn't talk to them angrily explicitly, I mean, this is what I felt inside me. Now when they were giving us the child in the first place…I mean before that, they gave us seminars. In these seminars, they told us about the frequency of their regular visits and how they would inspect us. And at that point I say, my friend, you are being tough on me before giving the child to me, like he is your property, and you don't follow up after you give the child. But that's what they think on the other hand: This family is reliable. So, let's pass them. Let's not waste our time, and this is what they think."

Another mother and father who thought that the system is mostly working properly, talked about the importance of follow-up:

F6: "...How the system is working, well about that…maybe it's working better than many other state institutions."

M6: "Like follow-up processes, well…"

F6: "Well it's like that at least for us. They came once in a month or once in three months, and they also went to her school. We didn't feel uncomfortable with any of these since we know that this system will be good for all children…"

Besides, the same parents talked about the need and importance for meticulous investigation and follow-up about whether biological families' conditions improve satisfactorily before foster children are returned to their biological families:

F6: "…As far as I know, there's no follow-up process in this system. There's an orientation process for the foster families, but no follow-up processes exist for the biological family."

M6: "They say there is, but how good it is…"

F6: "It is important what we understand when we say improved conditions. That may be related to money…let's say this woman is married to a rich person. Is she going to be able to take the children then just like that? Well, for a family who already gave up on their child or excluded her, it doesn't necessarily fix the problems when they have better monetary conditions or have a house, or start to work at a job with insurance. It's more related to the positive change in their psychology…because they investigated us. They came to our home and talked to us…."

M6: "We went through a psychological test. You answer five hundred questions during that three hours."

F6: "So, they do these kinds of things, well, like you go to the orientation for twenty days and they observe you there with the child in the meantime. If they subject me to this process, they should do the same to the biological family as well…I have concerns about whether they do it or not…Well, of course I always think about the bad scenario. Let's say they took the child from us today, and gave her to the family, a year went by, same thing happens again and this child goes back to the institution nursery. Because the state had taken her from the biological family, they may take her again. That's the worst scenario on my mind. It will be another trauma. The first one already was a trauma (being placed in the institution). Her leaving us and going to the family, it is surely again a trauma. If the other thing happens…even an adult can't withstand that...three traumas. That's why I hope that they take it seriously by checking out all the details when they are giving the child back."

Some families mentioned that the children's benefits and their emotions should be taken into consideration in terms of their possible reunification with their biological families. In this scope, they hope that the Family and Social Policies Department would make decisions based on these criteria and some changes in the system and law regulations should also be considered. A mother showed her reaction by criticizing the prevention of the child's permanent stay with them and the biological family's continuing legal rights to the child, even though they have not seen the child for a long time:

M4: "I know that there are children whose biological families have not been reached maybe for six or eight years. This system is so wrong. It's been eight years and the family never sees the child during that time, but they still don't give the child to the foster family. They do not care about the child. All their words start with 'for the good of the child', I mean the people in the institution. But they do not consider the child's good on this. If they considered a bit, they would give the child to foster family, for example for a child whose family has not seen her at all for the last six years…This is so wrong. These should be changed, and there should be a time limit. Say for example, two years, five years or you define a limit for it. Well, her parents have not seen this child at all for the last two years. And how we call them…her family. I think not anymore! I don't think so. The families don't see the children, but they don't give them. There is a system like this. They should break the children's connections with the families if they do not see them, after a year or a few years. There are families who keep seeing the child and I regard them as different, maybe they really cannot take care of the child. But now Ayşe has no longer any connection with a family who doesn't see her."

Similarly, another mother talked about the necessity for a change in the system that lets the children stay with their foster families since they have formed a bonding together, and considering the children would probably not find the same conditions when they return to their biological families:

M2: "My only request to the institution and departments who follow this process is that they make a decision by really taking the child's feelings into consideration, related to his future life. It is not very easy to compare the child's life with us or future life without us…but because he has now already had the whole family concept, it is very hard to build it from scratch. That's what frightens us the most. If the Family and Social Policies Department focuses on the child himself, or they think the best for the child, then they should consider all these. When a child has already had his family concept, there should be a system that could somehow persuade the biological family as long as their conditions are not much improved."

3.7.2. Need for More Transparency and Trust in the System

Many families think that more control, follow-up or change is needed in the system. Besides, some families also do not trust about the functioning of the system, or there are some points that they don't know or they are unsure about. It is understood that there is more transparency needed related to functioning of the system, children's backgrounds and the content of the biological family visits to better inform the foster families.

A mother and father who were concerned that their foster child could be taken away from them one day, questioned the institution's explanation to them in which conditions the child would return to her biological family:

M4: "They told us in the beginning that she would be taken back when the family can take care of her well enough as we do, but I don't think it happens that way. They told us she would go back to her biological family when they can meet these conditions…but that's not true."

F4: "Yes, it doesn't happen that way."

M4: "Not possible."

The same parents explained the importance of being given clear and full information by the institution about the foster care system and the child's background:

F4: "They mostly see it like, let's give the child to someone as soon as possible, so we can be done, and that's why they don't inform us in many matters correctly or exactly, about both the system and the child."

M4: "Well, this information is not provided to us. They say the neighbors reported after Ayşe was born, because of whatever was in the family, and Ayşe was taken by the State. According to another rumor, Ayşe's family left her to the institution when she was a few months old. So, they can't even share this information correctly with us. As far as we know, her father is under treatment at a hospital but we are not sure of this. So, if Ayşe was left because of this reason, it seems like the father will have the right to take her back from us when he recovers. Well, the State says... we can

give the child back to her family when that reason is resolved, if this is the reason. But we don't even know what the real reason is."

The parents who thought that the biological family visits should always be under the control of the Foster Care Unit, were feeling anxious and uneasy, because they did not know about the contents of those visits exactly:

M1: "…When someone from the institution is not present there…we are anxious about…we don't know at all…I mean what they say to the mother, how they approach the biological mother…"

F1: "We can't be sure."

M1: "We can't be sure…Well, for example, do they really approach the child in a proper manner there, we are not sure at all. In fact, that's what makes us anxious…So, we also shared our concern with the institution, about the things that the family is not supposed to tell the child. We told them, 'They may be telling things to Nehir that will negatively affect her, when you are not present there'."

F1: "What they will be telling her as she grows up or if they will be telling her wrong things, now we always have these concerns."

The feeling of distrust to the system brings hesitation to the same parents about getting psychological support from the Foster Care Unit:

F1: "We think that non-governmental organizations will be more sincere and helpful. We don't like the State thing, that State structure."

M1: "Well, we are unsure about whether we will get the right service or not. Besides, we are also unsure about if they accommodate any expert staff."

3.7.3. Need for More Recognition, Empathy and Feeling More Valuable

It was seen that many foster families needed to have a better recognition, appreciation, understanding, and to feel more valuable and important by the State and the Foster Care Unit. Behind this need, the influence of personal relationships with social workers was obvious. These interactions may be different for each family; they may be positive because of being pleased with the services they have received or

negative because of their disappointment and reactions related to some personal experiences. In both ways, these interactions and relationships are apparently significant for the families.

A mother and father who had a negative personal experience with their previous social worker, stated that they were very pleased with their current social worker now, by making a comparison:

M3: "Thank God we have our current officer."

F3: "Well the current officer is super. Even better than super. At least she can understand everything."

A mother shared her experience of when she took her foster child to the Foster Care Unit to see her biological mother. She said that she had expected a better approach to herself from the officials there, which showed her need for feeling more valuable:

M4: "They don't let us go outside of the institution. It's like, they keep it closed. I ask for some tea and they say there is none. And I say…I'm a foster family. I'm doing something voluntarily. You may offer me some tea there, while you make me wait for an hour. Well…nothing…they treat me badly. They shouldn't treat me like this. Because in fact I am their volunteer."

In addition to the relationships with the social workers, the families also emphasized the perception of the State for foster families within a wider system base. Many foster families think that blood connection matters a lot for the State. In their opinions, the State places biological families in one step ahead, while foster families and foster children are perceived as secondary. These opinions of many foster families also show their needs for more recognition, empathy, feeling more valuable and important by the State's institutions.

A father stated: "For the State or the thing that we have (in our culture), you know, blood connection matters a lot." (F2)

From another father's comments, it is understood that he expects more empathy and being considered as more valuable by the Foster Care Unit:

F3: "The officials say, this child is not yours and you are just a babysitter. That's what they say to us, but it's not really like being a babysitter. I have taken in him and I will be raising him until he reaches eighteen or twenty years old…then they come and say this child is not yours!"

Another mother and father wanted to be taken into more consideration when decisions would be made for the child, and they thought that they were perceived as in the secondary place as a foster family by the State:

M4: "…The institution is always on the side of that the child goes to her biological family."

F4: "If you think of this as a triangle, I mean the foster family, biological family and the child, biological family is always one step ahead in the State's practice. They don't consider the child as first and they don't consider the foster family as first either…They always place the biological family in the front. Biological family can be important in some situations, but in some others…The child and the foster family must be kept ahead of the biological family by the State in many occasions."

Another father explained that they did not prefer the State's institution for receiving psychological support as a foster family, by meaning the Foster Care Unit, because they needed more understanding:

F6: "When you go to that side, the State institutions, there are formalities, it is official. I mean, you cannot find a similar warmness there. Even though the people try to have the best intentions, firstly you cannot find that warmness, because they do their job. They have to be more objective. That objectivity bores you from time to time. You expect that they see things a little from my side, because there's another thing involved, for us things get emotional."

3.7.4. Need for Psychosocial Support

As mentioned before, some families have anxiety related to explaining to the child his/her real family, and so they need counseling in this process to do this properly with the support of an expert. According to the families' statements, they need a

psychologist or a pedagogue whom they can trust in their expertise and who have experience in working with foster families.

A family is considering to seek psychological support for dealing with the process related to possible leave of their foster child from them. Another family is currently receiving psychological support about how to treat their foster child for setting limits and how to improve their relationship with her. These two families also received counseling to prepare their biological child during the period when they were deciding to become a foster family. So, it is seen that some families need this kind of support during the preparation stage before they become a foster family.

A family has started to receive counseling support from their social worker at the Foster Care Unit for preparing the child before explaining to him his real family, which seemed that they were benefiting from this support. Another family stated that they could consult their social worker about any problems related to the child during the routine home controls, and they were pleased with this kind of service. On the other hand, some families do not prefer the State's institutions for psychological support. They plan to ask for this support from an expert at the Foster Family Association, and they trust this association.

There are some types of support that the families expect from the State. There is a family who thinks that the State must provide foster families with pedagogical support for the child since not every family could afford to get private support. Besides, there are two families who indicated the importance of educational support provided for the child by the State. Some families benefit from the scholarship quota of private schools since the children are under the protection of the State. However, a family told that sometimes private schools would not accept the child in this status since they said that their quota was full already. So, there is more need for the State to give support to families for the child to benefit from this right. A mother wanted the State to provide a legal time off from work to working foster mothers similar with maternity leave, during the orientation period with the foster child.

In addition to the supports received in the nuclear family, extended family, from close ties, and experts, it is seen that the foster families also support each other. There is a circulation of information among them and they share their experiences with each other. Just the feeling of not being alone or thinking that there are also others who have been going through similar experiences, make them feel good. They talk about their similar concerns. They can get information from other families about where they receive psychological support. Sometimes they even consult with each other through online forums for the solution of their problems. All these psychosocial supports provide the families with feeling more secure and make it easier for them to deal with the difficulties.

Despite the shortcomings or needs they see in few areas of the system; most families want the foster care system to become more widespread so that the children under the protection of the State can grow up in a family setting. Besides, they think that people around them generally do not have enough information about the foster care system. Some families explain about the system to people around them and share their experiences with them so that it may spread more.

3.8. FOSTER PARENTING AS A JOINT EXPERIENCE AND COUPLE INTERACTIONS

In all families, the mother and the father were interviewed together because being a foster parent is a joint experience shared by the couples. Another reason for interviewing the mother and the father together was to observe and note the verbal and non-verbal interactions between the partners. Interpretations of the participants' statements and their interactions as a couple are noted below:

Firstly, all parents had officially applied together with their spouse to the Foster Care Unit to become foster parents since they have been living together in the same house as married couples. In addition, both the mothers and the fathers have been actively involved in caring for their foster child after becoming foster parents and they have lived through all these processes together. For these reasons, the interviews went

on very fluently, since both partners had a lot of experience to tell the interviewer. For almost all couples, when they were asked in the beginning of the interviews how they had decided to become a foster family, both partners were thoughtful to give the word to each other to speak as first, acknowledging their spouse's role in their shared fostering experience.

In general, for all couples, during the interviews they were adding something else on to what the other partner has just said, and then the other partner was again continuing to speak and went so on. All couples generally agreed with each other in their opinions, feelings and plans related to their foster child, and their fostering experiences. Sometimes, one partner was speaking for both, using words such as "We think…", "We feel…" or "We plan to…" as the other partner seemed to agree. Some couples were completing each other's sentences when one partner was thinking what to say next, correctly filling in what each one was going to say since the other one then told the same thing. Some couples were sometimes speaking at the same with the excitement to tell their experiences. So, in general the couples seemed like unified with each other in their foster parent roles, experiences and goals. For some couples, there were some instances in which they did not agree and discussed with each other, but these instances were very few and were related to matters such as whether the child should better attend to private or state school; behaviors of the workers at the dormitory; whether the home visits by social workers should be done by informing the family in advance or abruptly; and in which way to explain to the child the truth about the real family. In general, it was seen that all couples left space for each other to express their feelings and thoughts.

Some couples were making jokes about or teasing their partner, which gave an impression that they were emotionally close and enjoying each other's company. (More detailed explanation and examples of this can be found under the "Sense of Humor" subtheme on p. 71.) As some fathers told their experiences, in their statements they showed understanding and empathy for their wives' feelings for wanting to take in and

raise a foster child in the beginning and for the kind of difficulties their wives have lived after the child's coming home. Some fathers mentioned appreciatively that their wives have given much effort as foster mothers, and the mothers were pleased with their husbands' support in taking care of the child, which were realized in both partners' words and voice tones when they were talking about these points.

During the interviews, there were few instances with almost all fathers occasionally asking their wives about some minor details of their past experiences since they have become a foster family, when they could not remember them exactly. In this respect, the mothers were sometimes helpful to their husbands in refreshing their memories.

3.9. FIELD NOTES

As mentioned before in the Data Collection part, during each interview, the PI took some field notes. Field notes provide us information about the context of an interview. These are the observations by the interviewer about the physical setting, people present at the setting, and the interviewer's own feelings during an interview (Tessier, 2012). Some main points of field notes taken for each family are noted below according to the interview order:

Foster Family 1:

While the mother was speaking in a faster tone, the father had a calmer speaking. There were some instances the mother continued to another sentence without completing the previous one and wanted to explain many things quickly at once, which was showing her anxiety. As she was telling about the first day they met their foster daughter, she got emotional and tearful. There were many times the father asked his wife, "Wasn't it…?" to confirm the events he has told about that happened in the past since they have become a foster family. They were both very anxious about the child's future confrontation with her real family, and what she heard or would hear from that family.

Foster Family 2:

This family lives in a big, private house with much space, which seems suitable for their plans that they mentioned to possibly foster more children in the future. In general, it was seen that the mother expressed herself very well with a good vocabulary, and the father had some difficulty in expressing himself and choosing words. In addition, it was noticed that the difficulty of expressing himself became more evident in the parts where the father was anxious, and the pauses increased while he was speaking. In the parts where the mother was anxious, this was reflected in her voice.

Foster Family 3:

This family lives in the same building with their extended family who live in the other apartments. In the beginning of the interview, while the father was talking about their foster son, he got emotional and was almost crying. On the other hand, generally, the positive attitudes with lots of laughter of both parents, and the humorous attitude of the father drew attention of the interviewer. The support of their biological children for taking care of their foster child seemed very important for these parents.

Foster Family 4:

There were beautiful plants and flowers in the living room attracting attention which gave a positive energy to the house. During the interview, the mother spoke more quickly and excitedly, and by giving more details, while the father spoke by carefully thinking and in a slower tone and expressing himself concisely. The father seemed a very calm person, while the mother seemed to openly show her anxiety in her voice and body language.

Foster Family 5:

These parents seemed very warm people with much positive energy. While the father was talking about their foster son, he got emotional and started to cry and he needed to take a break for a short time. It was a touching moment for the interviewer.

In general, though, there were also lots of laughter and sense of humor of the parents during the interview. The father said that in their parental approaches to their foster son, they also benefited from their biological daughter's knowledge of child psychology because of her field of study in the university. The mother emphasized that their daughter was involved in every step since they have become a foster family and was very supportive to them in taking care of their foster child, implying her important role like a second mother to the child.

Foster Family 6:

In the living room of the house, there was a corner reserved for their foster daughter's games, activities, pictures and handcrafts special for her. On the other side of the same room, there was a library corner with many books of the father who mentioned himself as a good reader. In the beginning of the interview, these foster parents stated that they had just received news on the same morning that the biological mother was seriously considering taking the child back and added that they were devastated by this news. Especially the mother seemed very upset and began to cry when she was telling about this. The interview started by talking about this subject first and it was a touching moment for the interviewer. After the mother felt a little better, the interview questions started. At the end of the interview, they told that talking to the interviewer and sharing their feelings and experiences with her was somewhat relieving for them and that they both felt much better.

CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION

Seven main themes were found as the results of this study: Motivations; The Process of Bonding with the Child; Difficulties of Being a Foster Family; Coping with the Difficulties; Transformation; Anxiety Related to the Child's Future; and

Relationship with the System. These results will be explained and discussed in detail by comparing them with previous research findings.

The first research question was: What motivates people in Turkey to become a foster parent? According to our study, the decision to foster is not an easy one and most families had spent some amount of time to think about it before taking an action. Most of the families had first considered adoption, but because of the age limit required between the parent and the child to be adopted, and since the adoption would be more difficult and take longer, the families wanted to foster. Various motivating factors were found among the interviewed families to take in a child and become a foster parent, which constituted the first main theme, "motivations". These were awareness and sensitivity; saving a child; wanting the biological child to have a sibling; and being influenced from others. Financial reasons were not found to be a motivational factor for the foster parents to start fostering.

In our study, all interviewed families had altruistic motivations as they had an awareness of and high level of sensitivity for the children without a home and in need, and wanted to help them. This finding is in line with other studies on fostering motivations (Baum et al., 2001; Daniel, 2011; MacGregor et al., 2006; Rhodes et al., 2006; Tyebjee, 2003). The interviewed families acted to save the children from living in the institution, touch their lives to give them a better one, while feeling responsibility for the children and wanting to protect them. These findings were similar with the motivations in the literature: foster parents' desire to save children from being hurt (Rodger et al., 2006); wanting to give children a safe home and keep them away from having to be placed in an institution (De Maeyer et al., 2014; Rhodes et al., 2006); create a difference in children's lives (MacGregor et al., 2006; Tyebjee, 2003); provide children with good experiences in a family (Tyebjee, 2003; Wilson et al., 2007); and provide a child to grow up in a family setting (Baysal, 2017). Feeling sad and having pity for the children was also seen among the interviewed families. The families also had the eye to see the children's emotional needs to be loved and receive attention, and had the heart to want to meet these needs. This finding was also similar with other

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studies: wanting to give children love (De Maeyer et al., 2014; Rhodes et al., 2006; Rodger et al., 2006).

In families with only one biological child, wanting the biological child to have a sibling was seen to be another motivating factor. This was also present in some other studies which found that parents consider their own child to have a sibling as a company when they make the decision of fostering (Andersson, 2001; Baum et al., 2001; Wilson et al., 2007).

Another motivating factor among the interviewed parents was being influenced from others. Three foster parents had learned the foster care system from a family or a friend who was fostering and seeing them fostering a child was effective on their decision to foster. Another foster mother had visited a charity and she was inspired to take a child herself by observing there an example of the children being taken care of well. The role of knowing other foster parents in having awareness and positive attitude towards foster care, and on the influence of becoming a foster caregiver were found in some other studies as well (Baum et al., 2001; Baysal, 2017; De Maeyer et al., 2014; Tyebjee, 2003).

Taking an overall look at the different motivations in our study, a noteworthy point was that for each interviewed family, there was not just one motivation to foster but rather they were motivated by a combination of different factors. For example, one of the families, having an awareness and sensitivity for the children in need, wanted to save a child, and at the same time wanted a sibling for their own child. Another family, already having awareness and sensitivity for the children's needs with no home, desired to save a child and then wanted to act as they were influenced by another foster caregiver. Smithgall et al. (2008) pointed out the importance of social networks on individuals who consider fostering to take a step further and become active, since they found that while foster parents had various other motivations to start fostering, most of them also previously knew other people who were fostering or being fostered.

The second research question was: What are the experiences of foster parents in Turkey? Experiences are a comprehensive field of inquiry, so they will be discussed under categories of main themes:

The second main theme was "the process of bonding with the child". The interviews with the parents indicated that after the children come to foster families' homes, parents accept the children from the beginning, and as they spend more time and share things together, they get used to them and embrace them more by time. Almost all families stated that they had been feeling as if their foster child had been with them from the beginning, forgetting that s/he came from another family. As mentioned before, four of the interviewed families had first wanted to adopt a child, but then had chosen to foster. The other families, although had not considered adoption, they too plan to have a long-term relationship with their foster child. Hence, with having these intentions, this brought the feeling of belongingness of the child to them, as all these families regarded their foster child as one of their own children and someone part of the family, and saw themselves as the child's primary caretakers.

It is also not difficult to understand that these parents, initially taking a step towards fostering because they had sincere feelings of sensitivity, pity and feeling sorry for the needy children with the intentions to protect and save them, were now having heartfelt feelings of love for their foster children and have built a bonding with them. So, considering these factors, loving the children and being attached to them with time was inevitable for the parents, as stated by one of the fathers: "How can I not get attached?" and as expressed by his wife: "I cannot give love to the kid if I cannot get attached to him anyway."

On the other hand, the expectations from the foster parent role by the state seems different since many participants stated that when they were starting fostering, they had received verbal messages from the Foster Care Unit as to not to see their foster child as their own or not to become too attached, because of the possibility that the child could be taken and given back to the biological family. Indeed, although fostering a child may possibly continue for a long-term, the Foster Care System is still a

temporary caregiving model in Turkey (www.koruyucaile.gov.tr) and other countries (Broady et al. 2010; De Maeyer et al., 2014; Smithgall et al., 2008). Moreover, there is a view of foster parenting as "a profession and a career" (Isomaki, 2002, p. 628) because it is a specific practice of child care, entails the need for parents to have pre-service training, and to be involved with other responsible parties in the child welfare system. This perception of foster care as a profession may also be close to that type of providing care to many foster children at once or the children's frequent moving in and out of the foster home with breakdowns in the placement or returning to the biological family, which could entail different relationships in bonding between the foster parents and the children.

The third main theme was: "Difficulties of Being a Foster Family". One of these difficulties was related to the attachment behaviors of some of the foster children and the foster parents' adaptation to this situation. Most of the children in the interviewed families, had been left to the institution either as infants or immediately after they were born. In the institution, there were many nursing women who cared for the children, and the children saw every caregiver there as a mother, interacting with variable multi-mother figures. So, this was different than forming an attachment to a primary caregiver, and having preference while seeking and keeping proximity for that caregiver, which is an important developmental stage for infants (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Zeanah et al. (1993) identified "nonattached attachment disorder" for infants who does not prefer a specific attachment figure and have diffuse relationships with their caretakers, which was associated with the conditions of institutionalized children. This may explain what the participants' foster children have lived through. Most of the children also did not know a father figure before they came to the participants' homes, and building a bond with a father was a new experience for them. Because of these factors, it seems that it takes a while for the children to make a transition to a primary mother and father figure, whereas the foster mothers and fathers expect to be accepted by the children and have a close relationship with them as soon as possible. One mother and father defined this experience as surprising and different than they had lived with their own child, and

another mother was concerned about the child's preference of other women over her and whether the child was securely bonded with her.

Besides the attachment issues with the child, the families had mutual adjustment difficulties with their foster child. Since the children were seen by the families as part of the family, they all expected them to adapt to their family structure and culture over time. The children brought their habits of eating and sleeping they had gained in the dormitory to foster homes, so the need for time to break these habits and adapt to the order of the house is understandable. All parents also have had difficulty in coping with the children's unwanted behaviors or in communicating with the child in the beginning. These behavioral problems were very similar with those of the foster children in Baysal's study (2017). In our study, some children also had a fear and anxiety of being left and sent back to the institution, so the families had hard times with the child getting stressed or crying when they were leaving the house or at sleeping times. Similarly, Üstüner et al. (2005) found in their study with foster parents in Ankara that almost all parents had problems with their foster children's behaviors, and the children had difficulty complying with the rules of the family. They also found in some children fears of being left to the institution and this finding was also present in Baysal's study (2017).

While these were the subjects of conflict with the children, in some families, differences are seen in the approach of mothers and fathers to the foster child where one parent is the softer one and the other parent is tougher or more determined with the discipline on the child, in this way keeping the balance.

Some children had brought the habit of eating too fast and too much, because of fears of the food could be taken by other children, and the expectation from them to eat fast within a time limit in the dormitory. Eating too much might also be related to eating without being aware of getting full, but it might perhaps have served to compensate the emotional hunger the children had felt in the dormitory by eating. Overly eating was found in some of the foster children in Üstüner et al.'s study (2005) as well.

Almost all families were challenged since the child was very active, which they said after raising quiet children of their own, this was different and hard. Based on the families' statements, because of the limits set to the children in the dormitory, such as expecting them to follow firm rules, allowing them to go out up to a certain distance, and less variety of stimuli present, the children's much activity could be related to trying to push the boundaries with their arrival to a home environment, seeking to discover their new surroundings, and to their curiosity about the objects at home that they haven't seen before at the dormitory. In other studies, too, ADHD (Daniel, 2011), or mentioned as being extremely active and attention problems (Baysal, 2017) and other difficult behaviors or emotions of the children (Buehler et al., 2003; Wilson et al., 2000) were found to be a problem or stress factor for foster parents and could be a reason to consider discontinuing to foster (Brown & Bednar, 2006). "Externalizing behaviors" (Oosterman & Schuengel, 2008, p. 615; Jonkman et al., 2014, p. 2) such as aggression, attention deficit, and hyperactivity were observed among institutionalized and foster children.

Another field of difficulty was related to biological family visits. Most of the participants had negative thoughts and feelings for their foster child's biological family, because of their personal background and their past behaviors of neglect or physical abuse on the child. The participants also shared their reactions to the biological families because of not seeing the child at all or less frequent than they have right to, but still wanting to stay as the child's legal parents. On the other hand, some parents acknowledged the importance of any child's growing up with his/her biological family and some mothers could empathize with what the biological mothers might be feeling as they were separated from their child. While having these mixed feelings for the biological families, taking the child to the visits and the following period after visits are a source of stress and anxiety for both the foster parents and the children. The parents' stress is mostly related to what the child would hear from the mother and how s/he would be affected. Some of the children get confused when they meet their own mother and siblings, as to who exactly they are, and the other children who already

know their real mother live anxiety of separation from their foster parents. There is also possibility that these foster parents might be reflecting their anxiety and stress on the children, causing them to feel the same. Only one family thought it's in the child's best interest to live with his own family provided that their conditions improved, and all other five families desired the child to live with them permanently. So, mostly the foster parents' perception seems to be the child belongs to them on one side, and then there still is the reality of biological family presence on the other side who have the legal rights. Indeed, on the day of visit in the Foster Care Unit, as a policy the two families are not allowed to meet and see each other because of security reasons. These relationships are the opposite of those in that example in Canada (Brown & Campbell, 2007), where foster parents not only naturally accepted biological parents' contacts with the foster child, but also perceived their own relationship with the biological parents as important, and wanted to be in touch with them with a strong and ongoing relationship, for the well-being of the foster child. Taking this into consideration, then it would have been probably different for Turkish foster families and their foster children in terms of the difficulty and anxiety related to the visits if they had had that same type of relationship.

The fourth main theme was: "Coping with the Difficulties". Interviews with the families revealed that support of the family members is a main factor in overcoming the difficulties of fostering. Among the six families, except one family, the desire to take and raise a child first came from the mother, although this desire was supported by the fathers. In two families, fathers were skeptical about fostering before making a decision. In those families where the mother is at home, mostly the mothers handle the daily tasks of caring for the foster child, but fathers are also involved in taking care of the child and making any decisions related to the child. In those families where the mother is working, sometimes the fathers are even more involved in carrying out the daily tasks for the child. This finding is in line with Höjer's study (2004) in which she found that it was mainly women who wanted to foster, and some fathers were initially reluctant, but later fathers became as active as mothers in the fostering tasks, because

fostering required a commitment from both parents. Partners' supporting each other and both committing to fostering contributes to successful fostering (Buehler et al., 2003). The fathers in our study, support the mothers in the burden of caring for the children and overcoming difficult behaviors. They also spend quality time with the children in a variety of activities and represent "a positive male role model" (Wilson et al., 2007, p. 25).

In addition to the support of couples to each other, the biological children have had an important role in supporting their parents, by caring for the foster children, spending time and playing together with them, which contributed to their adaptation to home, and to their physical and psychological well-being. Because of this support, mothers and fathers can have a break from their daily routines and have more time left for themselves, and some families even feel less concern because their own children will replace their role in the future. The biological children's taking responsibility of the foster children and supporting their parents in this regard were found in other studies as well (Daşbaş, 2015; Höjer et al., 2013).

Interviewed families have also received support from their extended families, although for most of them this support came after they had seen the foster child. Some friends and neighbors also had positively commented on their involvement in fostering, while there had been also questions or criticisms from few others. Support from all these people was mainly acceptance and emotional support to the parents, and love and caring for the foster children, although one mother also received practical support from her extended family. There is a collectivistic culture in Turkey, whereby relationships with extended families are considered very important by Turkish people. So, extended families' acceptance and emotional support must be very important for the interviewed parents and this seems to have helped the parents overcome difficulties more easily.

The neighbors' and friends' comments and support also seem to have affected the parents since as part of collectivism, in Turkey, there is an expectation from others to comply with social norms and having a good reputation among neighbors and friends is important. Some interviewed families mentioned about having to explain to

neighbors and friends where the foster child has come from, and negative comments for the foster child have made them stay away from these people, whereas praises from neighbors and friends such as 'they are very good people' may have affected them as seeing fostering even more meaningful and valuable and becoming more motivated.

Having raised their own children, parental experiences are another resource from which the parents have benefited in their parental approaches, for developing solutions to issues, better understanding their foster children and which behaviors are expectedly normal. Some participant families even tend to put a boundary (Minuchin, 1974) between their family and outside interference in terms of their approaches to the child. This is demonstrated in one mother's words: "…Firstly, the arm breaks and stays in the sleeve, I mean we handle many things within ourselves." Similarly, another father stated that if their foster child did something wrong and they needed to get angry with him, then they did, and did not hesitate because of others that they were responsible to, meaning the Foster Care Unit. He also thought that the foster parent seminars they had attended were loss of time and needless for them because they had raised their own children and already knew how to approach a child. The perception of these two families may be viewed within the content of the cultural tendency in Turkey, regarding family life as private, and trying to solve issues firstly within the family before seeking any professional help.

All interviewed parents have set some rules and limits for the children and tried to instill discipline to deal with their behaviors, as they have also done with their own children, which again manifested their perception of the child as part of the family. Setting rules and limits was necessary for the parents to deal with the children's behaviors, but it may also have provided a consistent structure for the children as well, by being aware of what is expected from them without uncertainty and in this way having a sense of security they needed.

The interviewed parents' love for the foster children; acceptance of the characteristics of the children after some time; and their ability to show empathy and patience, were other factors that determined how they perceived the difficulties they

experienced and enabled them to cope. Knowing their backgrounds to some degree, all participant parents understand and empathize with why their foster children behave in that way. It's not just because of having this knowledge, but they also have the parental skill to show empathy for the children's feelings. Despite having to face the children's some difficult behaviors, they could also see the positive or fun characteristics of the children, which may have made it easier to show the children some tolerance. Similarly, some studies indicate parental characteristics and skills as a means to cope with fostering and be successful: Being attentive to physical and psychological needs of foster children, a caring attitude, being empathic towards what they have lived through, having an open-mind, and providing support for their emotional problems (Buehler et al., 2003), acceptance and understanding towards the children's differences (Brown and Campbell, 2007; Buehler et al., 2003), love for children and being patient (Buehler et al., 2003; Whiting& Huber, 2007). A structured family life with daily routines; clearly defined and consistent guidelines, discipline or responsibilities for children, but at the same time leaving some flexibility for the needs of children; and having expectations from fostering or the child that are close to reality, contributes to successful fostering (Buehler et al., 2003; Whiting& Huber, 2007). This kind of approach is exactly what the parents in our study have followed.

Considering that all the interviewed parents are aware of, sensitive and responsive to the needs of children, which was one of their motivations to start fostering, this factor combined with parental experiences, and the ability to accept and empathize with the children are all important qualities for parents to be able to get along and build a strong relationship with the foster children. Therefore, all these attributes seem to have made it easier for parents to cope with the situation when they faced difficulties.

Sense of humor was another personal characteristic in some of the participants. A humorous perspective on past or present challenging events or problematic issues, was seen to help them soften the hardness of the issue. Some participants also perceived their child's some of the behaviors as unexpected from him and found them humorous. Similarly, some couples were making jokes about or teasing their partner, wanting to

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ease the hardness of an issue being talked at that time. Humor can be one of the "protective factors" to keep resilience in coping with stressful or challenging situations, giving an emotional relief out of stress by laughing and "making light of the situation" (Julien-Chinn & Hayes Piel, 2019, p. 8-9), hence becoming less affected by that situation.

Families deal with the challenges of life with "family resilience as a process that develops over time" (Lietz et al., 2016, p. 661). Foster families who are resilient go through five stages of ongoing "coping and adaptation" whereby they employ various "family strengths" in each stage (Lietz et al., 2016, p. 664). These five stages seem very similar with what our interviewed families have lived. The families "survived" through the first stage with a cohesion among family members whereby they understood and helped each other, received support from their friends, neighbors, extended families, and other foster families; and believed in shared moral values (believing in the value of fostering). In the second stage, the families started to "adjust" to the changes in their daily life as well as to the new structure of the family, as they developed other strengths and found new ways of dealing with the troubles they faced. In the third stage, families became aware of the parts of fostering that they needed to "accept" as they are (e.g. biological family visits, home controls) but at the same time knew the aspects of fostering on which they can have effect (e.g. giving a child better life and quality time). While gaining a realistic insight about fostering, they were committed to providing foster care but still considered the family members' being united as important. Sometimes seeing the fun part and taking a humorous approach to events were other strengths for developing resilience. In the fourth stage, they became stronger out of difficulties and family members mutually regarded fostering as a positive, valuable, and developing experience. In the last stage, they have been sharing their expertise on fostering as they told that they informed other families about fostering. (Lietz et al., 2016).

The fifth main theme was: "Transformation", and this was explored under two headings: "Transformation of the Foster Family" and "Transformation of the Child".

When a family faces a major transition, for example another child is born into the family, the family life goes through changes in terms of the relationships of all family members (Dallos & Draper, 2005). Similarly, these changes happen when a foster child arrives in the family. So, in our study fostering affected not only every member in each foster family, but also the relationships between members changed as well, transforming the families. However, this transformation happened while protecting the core family values, family culture and structure, and biological children. Thompson et al. (2016) found a similar result with foster families, as they wanted and found ways to protect their own children and preserve the family system at the same time, while they faced some changes in the family.

Research studies in general reveal that fostering effect on the family is not either positive or negative but rather both (Höjer, 2004; Thompson et al., 2016; Younes & Harp, 2007). In our study, this effect was mainly positive. The families became more connected as a family thanks to the foster child. As whole family, they started to spend more time together with a more variety of activities, they had more joy and increased energy at home. While some couples stated their relationship did not change, some others said their relationship as a couple was affected positively since they have shared a new experience of being a foster family and have strived and struggles in this together. For a family, fostering was perceived as a kind of test, which they went through a challenging stage together as whole family by holding on to their family values and so this effect was seen positive. Having a foster sibling had a positive effect on some biological children as well since they became more mature and showed better manners and behaviors, as they became the elder brother or sister and took responsibility. Similar positive effects on the characteristics of biological children were found in other studies as well (Broady et al., 2010; Höjer, 2004; Younes & Harp, 2007). As the biological children were positively affected, this also affected their relationship with their parents. One participant couple said their relationship improved with their daughter, because their only point of focus was not her anymore and were not directing her too much anymore, leaving her some space. These findings are in line with some

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other studies, which found positive effect on couples as fostering brought them closer (Höjer, 2004) and positive effect on family relations as they became closer (Daşbaş, 2015; Pugh, 1996; Spears & Cross, 2003).

One point getting attention was in all participant families, the biological children were included in the discussions and decision of becoming a foster family, and their opinions were considered important. Taking a part in the decision seems to have affected their acceptance of the child and better adaptation to fostering (Höjer et al., 2013). Although some jealousy of their only biological child towards the foster child was reported by two participant families, the biological children still perceive the foster child as a real sibling.

Another change on the interviewed parents with only one biological child, was having to reallocate their time, attention, energy, and effort to care for both their biological and foster child and trying to keep the balance. This caused some mothers sometimes feel neglect towards their biological child while wanting to take care of both children. In one family, the children were shared, and in another family the specific daily tasks and activities done with the foster child were divided between the mother and father. The challenge of meeting the needs of and finding enough time for both children, giving less time for the biological children, and the feelings of neglect and guilt were found in other studies as well (Höjer, 2004; Younes & Harp, 2007). In our study, the parents did not mention about this change on the family as a difficulty of foster care though. They were describing it in a way resembling a situation as if a second biological child had joined in the family. They are aware though there is a responsibility to the state of good taking care of the foster child and this brings extra cautiousness because if something bad happened to the child, they would have to explain this to the state, which would be not easy. Although some parents mentioned the jealousy of biological children, tensions and fights between biological and foster children, no parent stated fostering affected their biological children negatively. The reason seems to be the perception of the foster child by the parents as part of the family and seeing these tensions as normal as sibling relations. But more deeply, these parents

could be in a "responsibility trap" (Höjer, 2004, p. 45) where the parents feel responsibility to both their own and foster children. If they don't take care of the foster child good enough and favor their own children, then they would not fulfil their foster parent roles (Höjer, 2004). On the other hand, if the task of fostering negatively affects their own children, then they would be in a position of have not protected their own children to any harm as a good parent, so this may have caused the participant parents understate any negative effects on their own children.

As the participant families transformed, their foster children were transformed as well. The children have adapted to their families' family and culture over time as being part of the family. Another important impact was improvement in their physical condition and positive changes in their psychological state or symptoms with the support of the families. The parents have taken an emotional satisfaction because of these positive changes, making them more believe in the value of fostering by making a difference in children's lives, and being more motivated. These children have seen a transition towards a more secure relationship with their foster parents as primary caregivers compared to past short-term interactions with multiple caregivers in the institution. Research shows that children who stay in institutions tend to have attachment disturbances, and that the quality of attachment improves in young children after coming into foster care, with a change of more secure attachment relationships with their foster parents (Smyke et al., 2010).

The children have also naturally overcome their initial fears of being left to the institution, but for those children with recurring biological family visits, the anxiety of separation seems to continue. So, confronting these family visits might be causing an adverse effect on the children's sense of security. However, children experience recovery in their behaviors and symptoms after some time has passed from the visits and as they continue to stay in their foster homes. The foster parents seem to be helping the children ease their worries, anxieties and stress, by continuing to be present, attentive and responsive to their needs and feelings, showing empathy and caring, giving emotional support and by providing containment of their feelings. Some

children have also improved their ability to show their feelings, as stated by the foster parents. Receiving caring, attention, empathy and emotional support seems to have strengthened the children's trust in their foster parents and made them feel secure. Schofield and Beek (2005, p. 8-9), described a model of a parenting model based on attachment theory for foster parents in long-term care, by which they provide a secure base in key areas for children: "promoting trust in availability, reflective function, self-esteem, autonomy, and family membership". Although a detailed and focused research needs to be done on these different parental characteristics, the foster parents in our study seem close to this parental approach in their relationship with the child. Ponciano (2010) found that a higher sensitivity in foster mothers, measured by being able to acknowledge a child's signals and to respond them, was associated with the more secure attachment of the child. Similarly, Oosterman and Schuengel (2008) concluded in their study that more sensitivity in foster parents was linked to a more secure attachment in their foster children, where sensitivity was assessed with the parents' availability in providing emotional support, and recognizing their autonomy. The foster parents in our study, seem to have this parental characteristic of sensitivity as well and thus promote a more secure relationship with their foster children.

The sixth main theme was: "Anxiety Related to the Child's Future". The participant parents One of their concern is the participant foster parents' concern about whether the children would be safe, happy and in good living conditions if they returned to their families. Since in the beginning all parents had the motivation of saving and protecting a child, and felt responsibility for needy children, it is very understandable now they carry this anxiety again for their foster child. It is indeed a very unfortunate and complicated situation for the child wanted to be protected from and shown concern against his/her own family, by other parents who have 'become' his/her father and mother. Another dimension of the anxiety is related to the strong bond between the child and the foster parents. The parents in our study seem to face a dilemma as discussed in the study of Broady et al. (2010). This is a dilemma between being cognitively aware that biological parents primarily have the parental rights to the

children so that the children can be taken away from foster parents any time, and at the same time feeling strong love for the children and not wanting to leave from them. This is defined as the "struggle of the heart" (Broady et al., 2010, p. 567). When the child must leave, having to separate from the child and adapting to the new situation may be hard and cause feelings of loss for both (Daniel, 2011; Isomaki, 2002) and may even result in not considering fostering any more (Smithgall et al., 2008).

The seventh and last main theme was: "Relationship with the System". Although the foster families see and approach their foster child as their own, there are other parties involved in the life of the child which the foster parents must deal with, being the State, other institutions such as school, and the biological family. Looking at their relations with the system overall, foster families are seen to carry concerns and may not be feeling secure enough within the system. They need to be better informed relating to the past and future of the child and expect more control by the State for the things they cannot control themselves, such as biological family visits of the child. They also need more acknowledgement, recognition, and being understood by the State and social workers. MacGregor et al. (2006) found similar needs of foster parents since they expected emotional support from the workers of child welfare agencies, better recognition for their ability to handle the foster children, receiving complete information about the children, and taking part in the decisions taken about the children. Whiting and Huber (2007) mentioned in their study about some foster parents feeling powerless, because of carrying much responsibility but at the same time having almost no authority on the decisions taken for the foster children. More transparency, control and trust in the system and recognition of their opinions on the future of the child would reflect on the interviewed foster parents and on all foster parents as having less concerns and anxiety both now and for the future, and feeling more part of the system, which in turn would affect the foster child more positively.

4.1. CLINICAL/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In this section, firstly, implications are discussed for clinicians. Secondly, some implications are made for the foster care system in Turkey.

4.1.1. Clinical Work with Foster Families

An important point is that many families in our study have lived adjustment difficulties with their foster child and dealt with some difficult behaviors and over activity of the child. For some families, these could be exhausting. Therapists can work on these issues with foster families individually on an ongoing basis and the families would benefit from this psychological support in a better way rather than just being informed about these issues at foster family seminars. Therapist can work on these difficult behaviors and hyperactivity with the children and their foster parents, understand the meaning of these prevalent behaviors with the foster parents, who have already quite good empathic skills, and ease the difficulty before it gets to a very challenging point. It is important for the families to know how to behave to the child when they face a problem and receive the effective supports to solve the problem.

Both the present study and previous research show that foster children may come into foster homes with their difficulties in attaching to caregivers (Schofield & Beek, 2005). In this case, the parents wanting to build a close relationship with the foster child as soon as possible, may feel concerned or upset thinking that they were not successful in parenting. In fact, all parents in our study regard the child as belonging to their family, like their own child, and perceive bonding with the child as very important. Thus, the attachment issues between the foster parents and the child in the beginning of the placement that is seen in some families, could be another important area of focus for clinicians regarding both educating the parents about possible differences in foster children and improving the relationship between them. Intervention studies would be useful in working with attachment issues. For example, Kitiş (2019) applied an attachment based intervention program using play therapy with foster parents and their foster children in Istanbul, results indicating improved

interactions between the parents and the children, through a positive change in parenting skills.

Another important point is that even the foster families may have similar issues, when working with the families, clinicians should take into consideration that each family may have different dynamics. For example, some of the interviewed families have biological children in their teens, who take much responsibility and the burden in taking care of the foster child and supporting their parents. In one family, although their teenager son also has taken much responsibility for the foster child, the parents were challenged by his behaviors which they perceived as puberty problems. In some other families, the age gap between the foster child and the biological child is closer, and there are some jealousy issues involved. In some families, mother is the primary caregiver and the father is mostly the supportive person, whereas in other families the burden is shared almost equally between the mother and the father. Therefore, when working with foster families, clinicians should consider these differences in families regarding what kind of a role every family member has in fostering; the parents' relationships with their biological children; and the relationships between the foster child and biological children. Examining the family dynamics for each family would provide clinicians with valuable information in understanding how balance is maintained in the family, in what ways each family would cope with the difficulties, and to what degree the biological children would play a role in helping to overcome difficulties.

When working with foster families' difficulties, it would be useful to focus on their parental skills and parental experiences that they have benefited most. Clinicians reflecting on these aspects as how valuable these skills and experiences are, would give families a sense of strength and enhance their coping abilities. Besides, these families see their foster child as someone from the family, and expect him/her to adapt to their family structure and culture. So, these families would benefit from an approach where they can work out with clinicians to find new ways of solutions to problems they face in a frame that looks familiar to them within the family structure and culture. Therefore,

it's better clinicians evaluate any possible solutions in terms of being acceptable, familiar and useful in that specific family.

4.1.2. Implications for the Foster Care System in Turkey

The foster parents always live with the anxiety of the possibility of the child to leave while having long-term plans for the child. There is also uncertainty in the legislation as to whether they will be able to adopt their foster child. A more transparent system with more explicit steps is important for lessening ambiguity for the foster parents and to be prepared for what awaits them in the future. The more the child stays with the foster family, the more it would be difficult to get separated for both sides.

An important point is to allow sufficient time for the foster family and the child to prepare them for separation and give them psychological support before and after the child is returned to the biological family, to cope with separation. In addition, some foster parents in our study seek the support of a specialized psychologist, of whose expertise they can trust in the process of explaining to the child the reality of having a biological family. For those families who cannot afford to pay for a psychologist, a referral list of psychologists could be provided by the State, or funds for these expenses must be provided by the State, which was discussed in Baysal's study (2017) as well.

Some of the interviewed parents seek counseling support from their social workers on issues related to the child. Those parents have built good relations with their social workers and trust the expertise of these people. Therefore, good relations between foster parents and social workers and being valued by the Foster Care Unit is important for the foster parents to ask for support and receive help which in turn benefits the foster child as well.

Preparing prospective foster families by educating them before the placement of the child, about what will be awaiting them such as the adjustment process of the child, any possible difficulties they may live with the child and how to deal with these difficulties, has utmost importance as well. Another point is that since all interviewed foster parents have foster children who have been very active or had some

psychosomatic symptoms, there may be more clinical children than less problematic children among those who initially stay in the institution and then are placed with foster families, like the interviewed parents' foster children. There is a need for professional assessment of the children and the foster families before the children are placed with the families, to evaluate if there is a good match between the child and the family. Although the foster children of interviewed foster parents are not under the specialized care of model, there may be also special training needs for some of these parents and need for psychotherapy for some of these children that would be provided by the State and the Foster Care Unit. So, in general for foster families and foster children who need these kinds of support, the State regulations should be arranged accordingly to provide the families and the children with these needs.

Some parents were concerned about that the foster children would lose their rights under state protection if they adopted the children, such as benefiting from private school quota without any payment for education, or becoming an official worker after finishing high school. This concern made some of them unsure about whether adopting would be a good idea before the children grow older and were self-supporting. A new regulation that protects the rights of the children even if they are adopted could be considered and regulated.

The foster parents have concerns about whether the children would be safe, happy, and in good living conditions when they return to their biological families. One interviewed family said they were very carefully evaluated by the Foster Family Unit before becoming a foster family. They suggested that a similar process must be worked for the biological families as well before reunifying the children with them.

An emotional support could be for the foster parents and the foster children to come together occasionally after the children will be returned to their own families, that will be organized by workers of the Foster Family Unit. This could prevent feelings of loss and separation to some degree. When the child is too young, and s/he cannot arrange to meet with the foster parents, visits can be arranged under the control of the

Foster Family Unit. This might be problematic though as there would be many biological parents who would not want their child to see "once were" foster parents.

While financial factors were not a source of motivation to consider fostering for the participant families, it is important to consider the differences in socio-economic status among families and provide them with enough economic resources to meet the expenses of their foster child. In some participant families, they wanted their foster child to attend a private school for him/her to have a very good education. The children are benefiting from the scholarship quota provided by the schools for foster children, so they are not charged for the education, and besides that the state pays for the expense of transportation to school. However, these families said that there were other school related expenses such as those for the school uniform, books and meals. For one family, who had a high-middle socio-economic status and said these expenses were a lot, still could save up the monthly payments by the state for the child in a bank for her to use in the future. On the other hand, another family who had a low-middle socio-economic status said they used the monthly payments by the State for the child's school expenses, which was harder to manage for them.

Foster parents expect an approach of being better understood, feeling valued and their opinions taken into more consideration within the Foster Care System. This approach is important for the foster parents to feel trustful with less uncertainty, and to overcome their anxieties and frustrations, which in turn will reflect on their relationship with their foster child. These foster parents share their experiences with other people and inform them about how foster care system works. So, living a smoother fostering experience also means that these foster parents will be suggesting being a foster family more desirably to other people, as a word of mouth advertising to gain more foster families. Other ways to make foster care more widespread would be more advertising on media such as informative programs about foster care on TV or publishing foster family stories on newspapers and magazines.

4.2. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A small and homogenous sample was used to understand the motivations and experiences of foster parents in Istanbul, Turkey. Istanbul, as being a place of many different cultures and socio-economic status of people living together in one city, is a good representation of the whole foster parent population. Foster families in our sample as well varied in some degree in terms of their socio-economic status and education. Although commonalities of meanings were found among the participants, the results should not be generalizable to all foster parents in Istanbul or Turkey.

While aiming a little bigger sample of eight families with all the inclusion criteria in the beginning of the study, interviews were done with a total of six families since two families with these criteria did not want to participate later because of personal reasons and this was also effective on a smaller sample besides an already limited number of foster families in Istanbul.

In addition, a written permission was obtained from the Ministry of Family and Social Politics, which lasted 6 months between the application and the approval. The permission required and the wait time in between makes this population of foster parents not readily available to reach, so the researchers who want to conduct research on this subject should take these procedures into account.

There are only few studies conducted on foster parents' individual experiences, so more research needs to be done in the field. Our sample consisted foster families with at least one biological child. According to our results, biological children give much support to their parents and have a role in family relations and dynamics. For this reason, to understand biological children's experiences in depth from their point of views, future studies in which biological children are interviewed would be useful as well. On the other hand, foster parents with no biological child could have differing motivations for fostering, besides their experiences and support needs could be also different. So, future studies with foster parents with no biological child would also be needed.

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Table 1

Characteristics of Interviewed Foster Parents

Mother/Father Age	Mother/Father Degree of Education	Foster child Age/Gender	Number of biological children	Biological child Age/Gender
45(M1) 44(F1)	College (Both)	3 years old Girl	1	11 years old Boy
49(M2) 53(F2)	College (Both)	3 years old Boy	1	18 years old Girl
49(M3) 43(F3)	Secondary school (M3) Primary school (F3)	7 years old Boy	2	16 years old Boy 17 years old Girl
45(M4) 45(F4)	College (M4) Master's (F4)	4 years old Girl	1	9,5 years old Girl
50(M5) 56(F5)	Secondary school (M5) Primary school (F5)	4,5 years old Boy	2	19 years old Boy 22 years old Girl
46(M6) 51(F6)	High school (M6) Master's (F6)	5 years old Girl	1	17 years old Boy

Figure 1

Thematic Map of Main and Sub-Themes

Fig. 1: Thematic Map
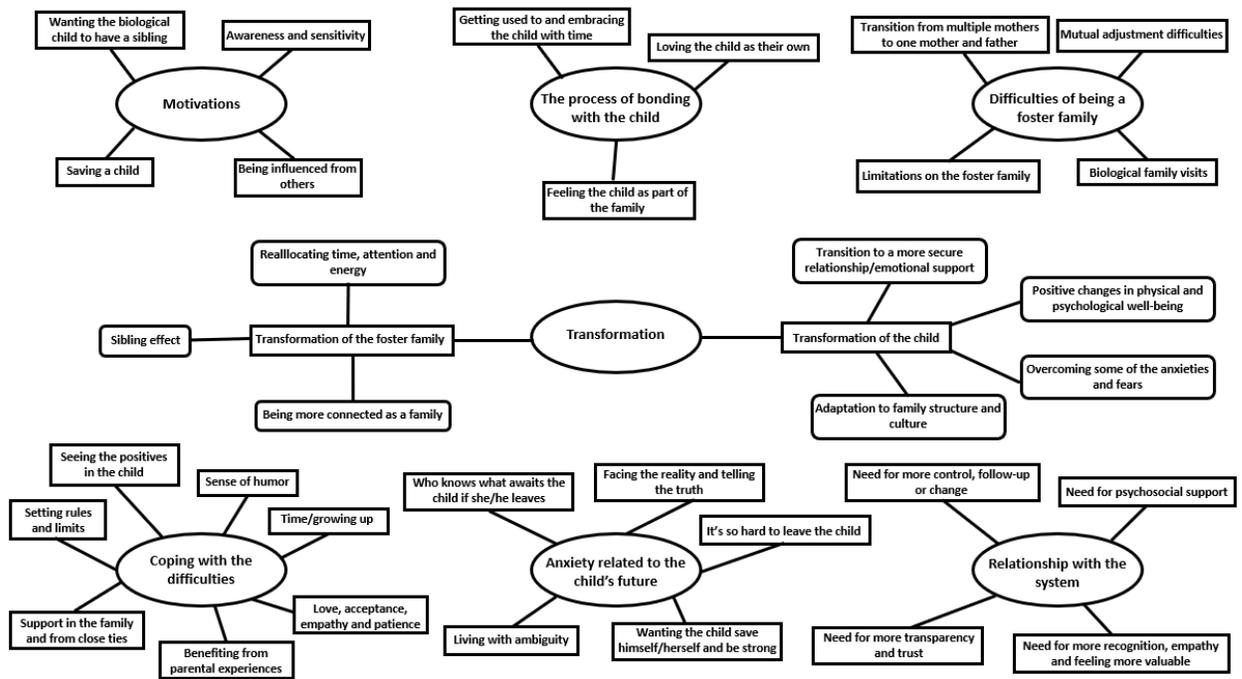
Appendix A

İSTANBUL BİLGİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ PSİKOLOJİ BÖLÜMÜ
KORUYUCU AİLELERİN DENEYİMLERİ VE İHTİYAÇLARI
ARAŞTIRMASI
Bilgilendirilmiş Onam Formu
(Informed Consent Form)

Değerli katılımcı,

Araştırmamızın amacı Türkiye'de henüz yaygınlaşma evresinde olan "Koruyucu Aile Sistemi" ne dahil olan ailelerin deneyimleri üzerine detaylı bilgi toplamaktır. Bu form siz araştırmaya davet edilen katılımcımıza detaylı bilgi vermek amacıyla hazırlanmıştır. Lütfen tüm bilgileri detaylı bir şekilde okuyunuz. Açık olmayan herhangi bir bölüm ya da aklınıza takılan herhangi bir soru olduğunda araştırmayı yürüten kişilerden daha detaylı bilgi talep edebilirsiniz. Araştırmamız İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Psikoloji bölümü öğretim üyesi Yrd. Doç. Dr. Yudum Söylemez Akyıl ve yüksek lisans öğrencisi Psk. Aygül Sarıbay tarafından yürütülmektedir.

Bu araştırmada sizden deneyimlerinizi, duygu ve düşüncelerinizi açıkça paylaşmanız beklenmektedir. Soruların doğru ya da yanlış cevabı yoktur. Çalışmaya katılmayı kabul eden anne ve babalarla "Koruyucu Ailelerin Deneyimleri ve İhtiyaçları" konusunda 1-1,5 saat süren bir görüşme yapılacaktır. Görüşme sonrasında yapacağımız değerlendirmelerin eksik olmaması açısından görüşme esnasında not tutulacaktır. Tutulan notlara sadece araştırmayı yürüten kişiler ulaşabilecek, 3. şahıs ve kurumlarla asla paylaşılmayacaktır. Araştırmadan 6 ay sonra tüm notlar tamamen imha edilecektir. Araştırma sonuçlarının sunulması ve/veya yayınlanması durumunda tüm kimlik bilgileri gizli tutulacaktır. Ayrıca bu çalışma sırasında koruyucu ailesi olduğunuz çocuğun kimlik bilgilerini gizli tutmak da bizim için çok önemlidir. Görüşme esnasında

hiçbir noktada koruyucu ailesi olduğunuz çocuğun kimlik bilgilerini paylaşmanız gerekmemektedir.

Araştırmaya katılmanın size hemen dönecek bir faydası bulunmamakla beraber, araştırma sonuçlarımızın hem koruyucu aile sisteminin geliştirilmesinde hem de gelecekte koruyucu aile olmak isteyen ailelerin bilgilenmesi açısından faydalı olacağı düşünülmektedir. Görüşme sırasında sizi fazla zorlayan herhangi bir soru olursa mutlaka araştırmacıyı durdurmanız ve ihtiyacınızı söylemeniz beklenmektedir. Bazen kimi konuları konuşmak beklenmedik duygu, düşünce ve anıları çağrıştırabilir. Araştırma sonrasında herhangi bir zorluk yaşarsanız araştırmacıyla bağlantıya geçerek psikolojik destek için yönlendirme alabilirsiniz.

Araştırmaya katılımda gönüllülüğünüz esastır. Araştırma hakkında bilgi aldıktan sonra katılmayı reddedebilir ya da istediğiniz zaman çekilebilirsiniz. Araştırma sonuçlarıyla ilgili bilgi almak isterseniz Aygül Sarıbay ile iletişime geçebilirsiniz: asaribay@yahoo.com

Araştırmamıza katıldığınız için teşekkür ederiz.

Katılımcı Ad Soyad:

İmza: Tarih:

DERİNLEMESİNE GÖRÜŞME SORU FORMU
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW FORM

Yaşınız:

Cinsiyetiniz:

Mesleğiniz:

Eğitim durumunuz:

Koruyucu ailesi olduğunuz çocuğun yaşı:

Kaç yıldır koruyucu ailesisiniz?

Biyolojik ailesi olduğunuz çocuklarınız var mı?   Yaşları:

1) Koruyucu aile olmaya nasıl karar verdiniz?
(Aile içinde konuşuldu mu?)

   a) Neler hayal ettiniz?

   b) Koruyucu ailesi olmak istediğiniz çocukta aradığınız özellikler var mıydı?

   c) Çekinceleriniz var mıydı? Varsa bunları nasıl aştınız?

2) İlk tanıştığınız günü anlatır mısınız?

   a) Gördüğünüzde nasıl hissettiniz? Ne düşündünüz?

   b) Ona ne dediniz? O size ne dedi? Ne yaptı?

   c) Eve gelmeden önce kaç kere görüştünüz? O görüşmeler nasıldı?

3) İlk günleriniz nasıldı?

   a) Birbirinize nasıl alıştınız?

   b) Nasıl zorluklar yaşadınız?

   c) Bunları nasıl çözdünüz?

4) Zaman içinde ona karşı duygularınızda bir değişiklik oldu mu? Onun size karşı duygularında sizce bir değişim oldu mu?

5) Şu anda koruyucu ailesi olduğunuz çocuğunuzla nasıl bir ilişkiniz var?
   a) Birlikte neler yaparsınız?
   b) Sevginizi nasıl gösterirsiniz?
   c) O sevgisini nasıl gösterir?

6) Koruyucu ailesi olduğunuz çocuğunuzla ilgili geleceğe yönelik neler düşünüyorsunuz?
   a) Kaygılarınız var mı?
   b) Beklentileriniz neler?
   c) Hedefleriniz neler?

7) Koruyucu aile olmak ailenizi nasıl etkiledi?
   a) Eşinizle ilişkinizi nasıl etkiledi?
   b) Öz çocuklarınızla ilişkilerinizi nasıl etkiledi?
   c) Çocukların kendi aralarındaki ilişki nasıl?
   d) Aile üyelerinden, yakınlarınızdan bu süreçte destek aldınız mı?

8) Koruyucu ailelikle ilgili zorluklar yaşıyor musunuz?
   a) En çok ne tip zorluklar yaşıyorsunuz? (Geniş aile, sosyal çevre, okul ile ilişkiler, vs.)
   b) Nereden destek alıyorsunuz?
   c) Başka ne tip bir desteğe ihtiyacınız olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz?

   Bu konuyla ilgili söylemek istediğiniz başka bir şey var mı?

ETİK KURUL DEĞERLENDİRME SONUCU/ RESULT OF EVALUATION BY THE ETHICS COMMITTEE

(Bu bölüm istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurul tarafından doldurulacaktır / This section to be completed by the Committee on Ethics in Research on Humans)

Başvuru Sahibi / Applicant: Yudum Akyıl

Proje Başlığı /Project Title: Koruyucu Ailelerin Deneyimleri ve İhtiyaçları
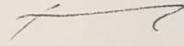
Proje No. /Project Number: 2014-40024-025

1.	Herhangi bir değişikliğe gerek yoktur / There is no need for revision	XX
2.	Ret / Application Rejected	
	Reddin gerekçesi/Reason for rejection: ^	

Değerlendirme Tarihi / Date of Evaluation: 2 Aralık 2014

Kurul Başkanı / Committee Chair
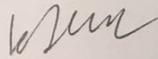
Yrd. Doç. Dr. Itır Erhart
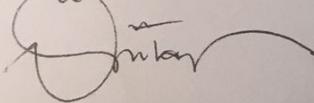
Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Hale Bolak

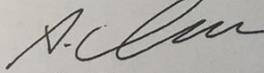Üye / Committee Member

Doç. Dr. Koray Akay

Üye / Committee Member

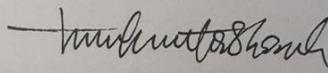Doç. Dr. Ayhan Özgür Toy

Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Aslı Tunç

Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Turgut Tarhanlı

Üye / Committee Member

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Uğur Kevenk