

Criteria for the selection of foster families and monitoring of placements.: Comparative study of the application of the *Casey Foster Applicant Inventory-Applicant Version* (CFAI-A)

Paulo Delgado, Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Portugal
Vânia S. Pinto, Assistência Médica Internacional, Portugal

Abstract

Based on a literature review, this article frames different stages of the foster care process, identifying a set of standardized measures in the American and Portuguese contexts which, if implemented, could contribute towards higher levels of foster success. The article continues with the presentation of a comparative study, based on the application of the *Casey Foster Applicant Inventory-Applicant Version* (CFAI-A) questionnaire, in the aforementioned contexts. Taking a comparative analyses of CFAI-A's psychometric characteristics in four different samples as a starting point, one discovered that despite the fact that the questionnaire was adapted to Portuguese reality, it kept the quality values presented on the American samples. It specifically shows significant values regarding reliability and validity. This questionnaire, which aims to assess the potential of foster families, also supports the technical staff's decision making process regarding the monitoring and support of foster families, while it also promotes a better decision in the placement process towards the child's integration and development.

Keywords

Foster care; Child care; *Casey Foster Applicant Inventory-Applicant Version* (CFAI-A); Selection; Measurement

1. Introduction

The experience of living in a stable, secure and 'normal' family environment, associated with the creation of new affective bonds, and whenever possible the preservation of the emotional ties that the child carries from his/her past, may aid the construction of resilience, the physical and psychological recovery, and the discovery of a path leading the child to his/her well-being and integral development.

The terms and purpose of foster care must be subjected to continuous assessment, requiring a constant communication between the main actors of the measure and a collection of updated data able to reflect and evaluate the quality of the placement. This study article presents a set of tools available in the U.S. and Portugal contexts that abide to that purpose, guiding the placement process or supporting the candidates' recruitment and selection.

1.1. The process of foster care: the selection of families and monitoring of placements

The selection is the process that determines which families may care for foster children after the initial recruitment. It may be continuous, from spontaneous applications addressed to the social services, and punctual, as in the case of marketing campaigns, which have a certain regularity in systems where foster families have a greater expression. In such cases, the effective use of marketing is increasingly more necessary to “capture” the interest of potential candidates, conducting the recruitment in the medium/long run according to a predefined strategy, which should be periodically assessed and subjected to scientific research (Sellick, Thoburn, & Philpot, 2004). In particular, campaigns or messages should be focused on the characteristics families must have to care for foster children, which may more easily attract people with these traits (Sellick et al., 2004).

On the other hand, knowing the lifestyle and characteristics of foster families helps setting potential ‘targets’ for the campaign (Triseliotis, Borland, & Hill, 2000), if the intention is to expand the list of foster families with the same profile. In situations where there is a shortage of foster families, the same authors suggest that marketing campaigns should be directed to specific groups, such as people under 40, people living alone, people working in social institutions, childless or without any dependent children and people who are unemployed.

In fact, the entrance of women in the labour market in full-time positions, precarious employment and labour pressure, the increase of divorces and marital separations currently affect the typical profile of foster families, which is: married couples where the woman doesn't work or is only part-time employed (Berridge, 1997 and Sinclair et al., 2004). Indeed, “We cannot do good if we have no time to do it” (Kelly & Gilligan, 2000, p.10). Unlike what happens in adoption cases, where many applications are spontaneous and no marketing campaigns are required, in the case of foster care “there are less families willing to foster than children in need of fostering” (Amorós & Palacios, 2004, p.102). Thus, the same authors concluded that marketing and recruitment campaigns

are the key elements to reduce the shortage of foster families; Berridge (1997) furthermore adds the retention of foster parents in the system. Triseliotis, Sellick, and Short (1995) go as far as saying that “increased support to retain existing carers seems preferable to continued new recruitment”, naturally referring to the British system, where this measure achieved a large expression (p.41).

Marketing campaigns should be planned and also clearly define the demographic group of potential foster families, as well as also for the modality(ies) of foster care, the messages to be conveyed and the means and resources that are to be used (Amorós & Palacios, 2004). The weaker the culture of foster care is in a system, the greater the need for generalist campaigns, i.e., directed towards the entire population, “to achieve a double objective: raising awareness and attracting potential candidates” (Amorós & Palacios, 2004, p.150). Triseliotis et al. (1995) underline the need to avoid using “vague and overtly sentimental material, which often proves counter-productive” (p.42).

Once a family is recruited, after an initial contact is established, it's necessary to provide basic information about the modality and to establish the socio-economic conditions of the potential candidates, their motivations, personal profile and family dynamics, as well as health level and criminal record.

The duration, procedures, activities, and final decision of the selection process vary according to the model. This may be subdivided into sequential phases, include individual interviews and with the entire family, imply one or more home visits, can include succession number of meetings or the enrolment on a training course. Furthermore, it may also include the thorough filling of questionnaires or other assessment tools which are being studied by this article. As soon as the candidates' motivations are confirmed and the requirements established by the selection criteria are met, the final approval may be the responsibility of the foster care team, of a different or institution of the social services authorities, or even administrative commissions representing different groups or entities within the community.

With multiple options and paths according to the reality of each national, regional or local context, one element seems to be rather consensual: that each candidate family is to make a self-assessment, learn their motivations and decide whether or not, on that particular moment, the proper conditions to become a foster family are in place, in detriment of an external assessment that could represent a judgment (Triseliotis et al., 1995). Assessing families is not the idea or mission of the selection process, but rather to only inquire whether

or not families can provide the necessary conditions to foster children in danger and can perform an extremely difficult, complex and unpredictable task. The attachment pattern that characterizes the candidate to foster may be a sign that an adult may become an able foster parent, with an autonomous and reflexive spirit (Walker, 2008).

Colton and Williams (2006) identify four main motivations for fostering, which call for different responses. If the motivation is based on the desire to nurture and love a child, adoption will be more appropriate; if duty and obligation are the predominant feelings, this pattern can be mostly found in foster families with family ties to the child, i.e. kinship care; the altruistic desire to help a child or a family in need can be found in most foster families without family ties; and finally, if the objective is to improve personal situation, by exploiting the child or the system, a small minority of people is identified that should be repelled by the recruitment process.

The initial training period is particularly important if candidates are to perform this reflection; it should constitute an educational area for adults that confronts perspectives, theoretical models and praxes of those who are experienced on this field, anticipating difficulties and obstacles that will arise in the process, dispelling doubts regarding the principles and goals of this measure and regarding the role of each actor. Training is, undoubtedly, “a privileged space to develop complex skills, but also to differentiate the parental role from the professional foster care” (Bosse-Platière, Dethier, Fleury, & Pasquier, 1999, p.12). This is the recognition that such complex and difficult task cannot be performed without due preparations. Fostering needs “more than pure commitment, it also requires knowledge and skills” (Triseliotis et al., 1995, p.46).

Lowe (1999) highlights the formation of two other groups, apart from foster parents: the sons and daughters of foster parents who distinct and specific needs from parents' and the members of the foster care team, who are in charge of the recruitment, training and supervision of foster families. The time the child will be staying, the cessation of the stay, and the contact with the biological family are example of concrete issues that must be discussed and provisioned for. The attachment, the child's development and the reversibility of initial damage, removal issues, academic records, financial issues and the relationship with the foster care team are some examples of the contents that may integrate the initial training or ongoing training processes, which should include, also and whenever possible, the participation of the foster parents.

The attendance of initial training and the approval as a foster family is an ecological transition, in many ways similar to getting a new job (Bronfenbrenner,

1996). A good adaptation to the new role and the concurring state of wellbeing are largely dependent on the cooperation and the trust that the foster family maintains with the social service team, on the type of communication established between them, and on the information, advice, and experience the foster family has before entering this new environment, i.e., before beginning the fostering process.

The preparation for the placement ideally implies a selection and a choice. The selection of a group of potential foster parents, if different options are available, should bear in mind the child's characteristics, ethnicity, social class, religion and culture, as well as background history and the challenges he/she represents. It should also consider other factors, such as the place where the foster care will take place and the estimated permanence period (Triseliotis et al., 2000 and Schofield et al., 2000). Obviously, one must not omit the foster family's profile and willingness, and also the child's needs and motivation, which may be expressed by the child himself/herself, regarding the foster family's profile. On one hand, because "it is much easier to teach new skills than to change long-established attitudes and values" (Sellick et al., 2004, p.99); on the other hand, without the involvement and direct work with the child, there is a greater risk of compromising the fostering process (Romaine, Turley, & Tuckey, 2007). The choice amplifies the child's integration probabilities and, therefore, the stability of the process.

Integration is a meeting between two sides, which is more likely to be successful when based on knowledge, desire and acceptance (Delgado, 2008). Sinclair, Wilson, and Gibbs (2005) talk about 'fitting in' or the child's adaptation to the family's lifestyle and empathy, when there is the establishment of bonds and sharing. Schofield et al. (2000, p.294) refer to the quality of the relationship between the foster parent and the child that needs to be "sufficiently good", i.e., mutually rewarding. If one wants adaptation and the quality of relation to increase, one must pay attention to options, points of views and choices of both foster families and children (The Fostering Network & Karim, 2003).

The set of data participants have before the process is begun and the initial contacts (whenever possible) determines their decision, posture, expectations and reaction to future obstacles; thus, it partially determines the placement's success probability. If the children they foster are considerably different from the type of children originally intended, the foster processes would be more difficult (Sellick et al., 2004). The rupture is undesirable, because a smaller number of different placements are associated with a better future performance in several dimensions of adulthood (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1996).

After the child is integrated in the foster family and during the stay, the social service team shall be responsible for supporting, helping, promoting and assessing the placement until its end, regardless of what causes the process to be finished. The process does not end with the child's placement; it rather combines during the monitoring period support with assessment (Schofield et al., 2000).

This placement monitoring, consisting of a set of voluntary and intentional procedures or activities, tries to ensure that the foster family has the necessary conditions for the child's proper development, to track the evolution of the child's biological family and to continuously analyze the conditions or assumptions that are the basis for that child's life project. It's, first and foremost, a moral obligation for the complexity, the risks, the vulnerability, the time and the tasks that foster care represents, to which one must add the amount that is paid to foster families that in certain cases is not sufficient to make ends meet (Sinclair et al., 2004). This is a good practice that promotes the maintenance of foster families and the prevention of disruptions. Hence, the monitoring can't be restricted to the support given to the foster family and the child; it must also include working directly with the biological family, trying to encourage changes that are necessary for reunification, often combining, and support with pressure.

1.2. Research in the measurement area within the American context

When it became evident that foster families have a significant impact on the development of the children they foster, one realized that new questionnaires, intervention plans, supervised training and adequate support should be explored to achieve a stable and quality placement (Buehler et al., 2003, Direcção-Geral da Segurança Social (n.d.), Militão, 2007 and Rhodes, Orme, Cox and Buehler, 2003).

For this purpose, many investigations were carried out towards the establishment and improvement of standardized measures that allowed for an access to foster families' different features of, thus allowing the improvement of the services rendered by training and supporting (Orme, Cuddeback, Buehler, Cox, & Le Prohn, 2007), in order to promote a better correspondence between the child that needs to be fostered and the family that will foster (Fisher et al., 2000 and Wilson, 2006). In Table 1, some of the main measurement instruments applicable in the U.S. context are synthesized. Although these come from studies with different variables, they share the same purpose, to understand and not only assess the features of the foster family. The table highlights instruments that were developed for the population framed within the foster care process, although some have been adapted to this reality later.

Table 1
Measurement instruments.

Author	Date	Instrument	Subject of study
Harden, Meisch, Vick and Pandohie-Johnson Sanderson and Crawley	2008 1982	Foster Parent Attitudes Questionnaire (FPAQ) Holland Vocational	Foster parents' characteristics and attitudes. Unique personality characteristics, social competences and abilities through association with foster parents' occupational interests.
Deal, Trivette, and Dunst	1988	Family Functioning Style Scale (FFSS)	Perceptions of family resources capabilities: interaction patterns, family values, parenting strategies, family involvement and mobilization resource.
Le Prohn	1994	Foster Parent Role Performance Scale (FPRPS)	Perception of responsibility degree in different aspects in foster parent role, as in the relationship with the children and social service staff.
Yates, Lekies, Stockdale and Crase	1997	Motivations for Foster Parenting Inventory (MFPI)	Type and degree of motivation for becoming a foster parent.
Orme, Cuddeback, Buehler, Cox and Le Prohn	2006	Willingness to Foster Scale (WFS)	Willingness to foster children taking into account their problems and individuality.
Orme, Buelher, McSurdy, Rhodes and Cox	2003	Available Time Scale (ATS)	Perception of available time for tasks as foster parent.
Coakley and Orme	2006	Cultural Receptivity in Fostering Scale (CRFS)	Promotion of child's cultural development
Orme, Cuddeback, Buehler, Cox and Le Prohn	2006	Receptivity to Birth Family Connections Scale (RBFCS)	Professional involvement, conscientiousness, moral and ethics, responsiveness and responsibility to biological parents.
Bartone, Ursano, Wright, and Ingraham	1989	Short Hardiness Scale (SHS)	Resilience to stress.
Windle and Lerner	1989	Dimensions of Temperament Survey Revised (DOTS-.R)	Expectations and character of foster parent and child.
Olson	1986	Family Adaptability and Cohesion (FACES III-couple version)	Cooperation between the foster parents.
Schumm, Paff-Bergin, Hatch, Obiorah, Copeland, Meens, et al.	1986	Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS)	Marital satisfaction of foster parents.
Schaefer	1965	Parental Acceptance Scale (PAS)	Behaviours and feelings of child acceptance.
Soliday, McCluskey-Fawcett and Meck	1994	Inventory of Parent Experiences (IPE)	Perception of the situation and satisfaction as foster parent and the social support.
Smith	1994	Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME)	Quality of interaction between the child and foster family and their environment.

Review of instruments that allow understanding some foster care characteristics.

A different type of more complex questionnaires allows access to new variables, resulting from the combination of several characteristics that are normally measured separately. In this set, one may emphasize the measures that assess the psychosocial functioning of the family and of the couple, which will be highly relevant for the emotional and behavioural adjustment of the foster child. It's possible to access this variable from scales that include the quality of parenting, family and marital functioning and home environment, foster families' mental health, and availability of social support (Orme, Buehler, McSurdy, Rhodes, Cox, & Patterson, 2005; K. Rhodes et al., 2003; K.W.Rhodes, Orme, Cox, Coakley, & Cuddeback, 2003). On the other hand, the *Parental Psychological Control Scale* (PPCS) assesses the psychosocial control of foster families (Barber, 1996 and Bogenschneider et al., 1997).

The *Potential for Foster Parenthood Scale* (PFPS) (Orme, Buelher, et al., 2003, Stone and Stone, 1983, Touliatos and Lindholm, 1977 and Touliatos and Lindholm, 1981, 1981) is a tool that should be filled out by social services professionals that comprise the foster family's potential to promote a successful foster care. There is also a version of this test that should be filled out by the foster parents, *Foster Parent Potential Scale* (FPPS), with the same objective. Within this line of research CHAP (*The Casey Home Assessment Protocol*) can also be highlighted. This consists of a set of standardized measures with the goal of identifying the skills of the foster parents and the relevant areas for future development and support, ensuring, this way, a quality fostering for the

child. This questionnaire assess the following areas: decision to foster, family history, physical and mental health, family functioning, parenting style, family and foster resources, social support, cultural competency, and ability to meet challenges (Orme, Cox, Rhodes, Coakley, Cuddeback, & Buehler, 2003; K. W. Rhodes et al., 2003).

This last inventory is closely linked with CFAI (*Casey Foster Applicant Inventory*), which also tries to define the potential to perform a quality foster care. Both scales have two versions: one to be filled out by the candidate and another filled out by the technician. The CFAI-Applicant version allows access to the candidate's perception of their own fostering potential by using six subscales: foster child development (FCD), challenging children (CC), worker/agency challenges (WAC), coparenting (CP), integration foster children (IFC) and kinship care (KC) (Orme et al., 2007).

1.3. Evolution of the measurement area within the Portuguese context

In the Portuguese context, the recruitment, selection and training of foster parents, carried out by social services (*Serviço de Adopções e Colocações Familiares*, n.d.) were used to be supported by a set of guidelines, including specifically: spouses' age and experience in married life, stable financial position, house with enough room and appropriate sanitary facilities, physical and emotional health, good family environment, family relations, respect for the child's natural family and origins, socio-professional status and educational ability. It also included the assessment of the reasons behind the application and the ability to collaborate with the foster care team. These guidelines sought to assess the candidates' ability to materialize a foster care with quality.

In order to summarize the characteristics of the child to be fostered, experts used a *Ficha de Resumo das Crianças /Jovens em Colocação Familiar* (Programa Acolhimento Familiar, 1994), which is integrated by the areas: composition of the natural family, grounds of the request, reason behind the placement, child development aspects, school situation, health status, relationship with the biological family, legal status and foreseen referral.

Both procedures, for the child and for the foster family, allow access to features from both candidates, which enables technicians to perform a better correspondence.

Regarding the characterization of the child and the foster family technicians may use the *Guião de Entrevistas para crianças e jovens* from Projecto Acolhimento Familiar (Machado, 1997) which focused on: the characterization of the biological family and personal situation, the characterization of the foster

family and subsequent integration, favourite friend/confidant, characterization of himself/herself, his/her daily life and weekends, his feelings towards school, life project and perception of family. Within this line of information gathering, one may also distinguish the *Guião de Acompanhamento Técnico às Famílias de Acolhimento* which provides opportunity for a detailed characterization during the foster care process and the assessment of the formative capacity of foster families. Similarly the *Guião de Acompanhamento Técnico às Crianças/Jovens Acolhidas* provides access to actors' perception regarding their own situation and their reality (Militão, 2007).

Regarding the use of standardized measurements in the assessment of foster families, one may mention the use of *Escala do Estilo de Funcionamento Familiar* (Programa Acolhimento Familiar, 1994) that allows the identification of such characteristics as commitment, appreciation, time, sense of determination, communication, expectations, mobilization, problem solving, flexibility, and positivism.

A small group of Portuguese researchers have shown interest in the process of foster care and in its unique characteristics.

Tribuna and Relvas (2007) elaborated a *Questionário Sócio-demográfico* designed to establish the socio-demographic status of foster families, the teenager being fostered and the fostering conditions.

One may also emphasize the development of the *Questionário aplicado aos Técnicos do Serviço Social*, which aims to reach the dilemmas and controversial aspects of the foster process, including the problems the technicians are faced with daily in this reality, its advantages and disadvantages and its strengths and weaknesses, thus investigating the changes that could, should or would be introduced where applying the process to the practical reality (Delgado, 2007).

Other questionnaires have been created such as *Questionário de Acolhimento Familiar*, made of two versions: the children's version, which evaluates the foster children inclusion, the impact of the placement impact in education and their thoughts on the fostering process; and the foster parents' version that analyzes the children's inclusion, the perception of education and the opinions about foster care process (Delgado, 2006).

The *Escala de Percepção da Relação Familiar* allows some understanding on the acceptance level, involvement in school work, emotional support, expectations and autonomy (Peixoto, 1999).

Other investigations have been based on the adaptations of American questionnaires. One may underline: the *Escala de Adaptabilidade e Coesão Familiar* (FACES II —*Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale*, Olson et al.,

1982), which allows the operationalization of the following dimensions: family cohesion, family type, marital and family adaptability to the fostering process; *Escala de Recursos Familiares (Family Strengths Scale, Olson et al. 1982)* that accesses to issues related to the transmission of values, dialogue, beliefs, family understanding and family resources, in order to prevent stressful situations; and *Escala de Comunicação Pais–Adolescentes (Parent–Adolescent Communication Scale, Barnes & Olson, 1982)* which evaluates global communication and the dimensions of a communication open to difficulties (in Tribuna & Relvas 2007).

The *Casey Foster Applicant Inventory–Applicant Version (CFAI-A)*, previously mentioned intends to evaluate the potential of foster parents in promoting a successful placement, being composed by six subscales: the development of the foster child on an educational level and involvement with biological parents (FCD-A), the development of the foster child at a social level and the transmission of rules (FCD-B), challenging children (CC), worker/agency challenges (WAC), coparenting (CP) and integration foster children (IFC) (Pinto, 2008).

This questionnaire confronts candidates to foster parents with the usual challenges; assists the technicians' decisions regarding the monitoring and support of foster families; and promotes a better decision regarding the placement of the child in a particular family after considering his/her characteristics (Orme et al., 2007). After attesting its importance, one decided to make a more detailed exposition of the psychometric qualities of this questionnaire, performing a comparative analysis between the American and the Portuguese researches.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Comparative study of the Questionnaire *Casey Foster Applicant Inventory–Applicant Version (CFAI-A)*

One may highlight the existence of four studies developed with the CFAI-A.

The *Technical Manual* (Orme, Cuddeback, Buehler, Cox, & Le Prohn, 2006) is a report that specifies the questionnaire's psychometric capacities. The items from CFAI-A were based on a review of literature concerning foster care families, of researches, law articles, results of focus groups with experienced foster families and partnerships with experienced researchers on the subject. This reflection created a list of 185 items, and based on its content, 12 domains were developed that are representative of a successful fostering experience (Orme et al., 2007). The sample consisted of women who were providing foster care, selected from a list of state and local associations obtained from the

National Foster Parent Association. The associations supported the initial release of the study. The contact between the researchers and the foster mothers was established later via e-mail, mail and phone. This study resulted in the adaptation of the questionnaire into six subscales composed of a total of 74 items.

The married participants were contacted later, during a second phase of this study, to assess their partners' interest to participate, in order to perform another investigation based on only in male participants, thus allowing for the assessment of the questionnaire's psychometric qualities with a different sample. The questionnaires were applied using the same technique (Orme, Cherry, & Cox, 2006).

The third investigation was carried out to assess the questionnaire's characteristics when the filling was done online (Orme, 2007).

The research developed in Portugal had the purpose to adapt this instrument to Portuguese reality. The translation was made by two specialists and three bilingual professional. Then the questionnaire was presented to foster care experts who highlighted the existence of some items that couldn't be framed within the Portugal context, which were removed (item 4 from the WAC subscale and the KC subscale). Which was followed by a pre-test to assess the questionnaire's characteristics in this population, according to the results obtained it was necessary to eliminate some items in order for the questionnaire to present acceptable internal consistency reliability. Certain items were not measuring what was intended, specifically in the IFC scale items 66 and 68. The questionnaire was applied in 14 districts of the country and in 2 IPSS ("Private Institutions of Social Solidarity"). It was delivered by the foster care technicians to the foster families (FF) and returned in a sealed envelope (Pinto, 2008).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Descriptive analysis

Concerning the characteristic present in the samples of foster parents used in various investigations, one may attest the existence of several similarities and it is even possible to highlight a typical profile. Foster parents have a mean age above 40 years and are married. The men are mostly professionally framed as compared to the women, who are professionally active or stay at home moms. A meaningful percentage of participants had become familiar with the reality of foster care through family and friends.

Participants also became familiar with this reality through social services, in the Portuguese sample and through other foster families, in the American context (on the online survey, no data were collected regarding this variable).

The demographic characteristic that widely varies is the level of education. In the Portuguese sample, the majority of participants have a level of education that ranges from the 4th grade to the 6th grade; in comparison, the three U.S. samples mostly refer levels between High School and University Degrees. Data could be explained because the Portuguese sample presents a higher age and due to the cultural and economic development of the country.

Also noteworthy is that the online study shows some discrepancies, including the fact that the foster mothers in the sample presents lower values on the “married” marital status and have the highest percentage of integration on the labour market, when compared to the other women on the other samples (Orme, Cuddeback, et al., 2006 and Pinto, 2008).

These data justify a careful consideration on the future of the foster care process (Table 2).

Table 2
Foster parents' demographic characteristics.

Study	Sample	Age (years)	Marital Status	Education level	Employment status	How became first aware of FF
Foster Mother's (Orme, Cuddeback, et al., 2006)	304 women	M=44.06	Married (74.6%)	High School or higher 97.7%	49.7% working 34.9% housewives	Friend/family 22% Other foster 22%
Foster Father's (Orme, Cherry, et al., 2006)	111 men	M=45.79	Married (97.3%)	High School or higher 94.5%	79.3% working	Friend/family 24.5% Other foster 24.5%
Online (Orme, 2007)	413 women	M=40.95	Married (57.9%)	High School or higher 89.3%	73.2% working 15.3% housewives	
Portuguese (Pinto, 2008)	197 men	M=42.11	Married (84.3%)	High School or higher, 93.4%	83.4% working	
	100 women	45-54 (39%)	Married (75%)	4th Grade 48.5% 6th Grade 20.2%	30% working 43% housewives	Social service 40% Friends/family 36%
	65 men	45-54 (42%)	Married (95.4%)	4th Grade 55.4% 6th Grade 20%	80% working	Social service 27.7% Friends/family 27.7%

There are similarities between the samples about the typical profile of foster parents. However, the main differences come from the Online and Portuguese samples.

When analyzing the years families dedicate to fostering and their mean and median, one verifies that the Portuguese families foster for more years than in U.S. samples. However, this sample presents a mode of one year in fostering as compared to the U.S. samples that have a higher frequency, between 3 and 5 years, which could be explained by the sample distribution.

Regarding the number of children, there is a significant discrepancy between the U.S. and the Portuguese foster parents, since the latest numbers show that the Portuguese participants have fostered significantly less children.

Thus, it is understandable that the Portuguese participants foster fewer children but for longer periods of time, which has obvious reflections on the foster care provided by the system. According to the American research (Orme, Cuddeback, et al., 2006), foster mothers receive a large number of children on

average (although the mode is between 0 and 5 children, since one could not access an exact value) in a time period shorter than the Portuguese sample. Foster fathers (Orme, Cherry, et al., 2006) present the higher mean, median and mode regarding the number of fostered children, and they foster on average for shorter periods of time (despite having the highest frequency between 3 and 5 years). In Orme's study (2007) these data were not collected Table 3.

Table 3
Number of years and total number of children fostered.

Study	Year's fostered			Children fostered		
	Mean	Median	Mode	Mean	Median	Mode
Foster Mother's (Orme, Cuddeback, et al., 2006)	7.26	5	3-5 (27.6%)	33	11	0-5 (32.2%)
Foster Father's (Orme, Cherry, et al., 2006)	7.18	5	3-5 (34.2%)	41	14	11-25 (27.3%)
Portuguese (Pinto, 2008)	8.53	8	1 (11.5%)	5	3	1 (23%)

There are various similarities between the samples if one compares the years of fostering. However the number of children fostered by the participants is largely different.

3.2. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of CFAI-A

An exploratory factorial analysis was performed on the samples, with the objective of assessing whether or not the items measured and represented the construct in which they were included (Pestana & Gageiro, 2005).

In the American sample of foster mothers (Orme, Cuddeback, et al., 2006), the questionnaire was reduced from 185 to a total of 74 items, since factor loading of some items weren't acceptable. On the online study (Orme, 2007), in order to achieve factor loadings superior to ≥ 0.30 in all items and a scree plot with a one-factor solution, some items would have to be eliminated.

When the results of the Portuguese study were analyzed, it became necessary to remove items, the scale being reduced to 43 items. On the pre-test a total of 9 items were eliminated, 2 of them due to negatively affecting the internal consistency reliability of the "integrating foster children (IFC)" subscale. The third item, such as the kinship care subscale, was eliminated because it was not adjusted to the reality of foster care in Portugal (the decision was made after consulting experts in the area). On the exploratory factor analysis, the elimination of some items was justified because they didn't support a valid and reliable measurement of each factor, i.e. presents more than one factor loading [FCD — (1, 3, 7, 9, 10, 15, 21, 24, 25, 28, 38, 41, 42, and 45); WAC — (22 and 47); CC — (11, 18, 26, and 31); CP — (55 and 57)]. It is also important to notice that some items that were eliminated also showed some weaknesses in Orme's study (2007).

In some studies it was necessary to make adjustments in the questionnaire; nonetheless, in the long run, all showed significant values at reliability level, particularly KMO values ≥ 0.50 and a scree plot of only one-factor solution for all subscales. It was also found that the items are correlated and that the identified items are indicators of the subscale (Pestana & Gageiro, 2005). (On the study regarding foster fathers (Orme, Cherry, et al., 2006) these data were not collected).

3.3. Confirmatory factor analysis

In the Portuguese study, since it was an adaptation from a scale designed and calibrated for a population with different characteristics, it was decided to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis, which resulted in the need to delete 3 items, i.e., FCD — (32), CC — (37) and WAC — (39) (the scale at the end of the study of its psychometric characteristic had 40 items).

From the results obtained, one could note that the model is well adjusted to the population (RMSEA < 0.08) except for the CC subscale. However, it has acceptable standardized chi-square values (for an acceptable adjustment of a hypothetical model to the data sample $CMIN/DF < 3$) and a CFI higher than acceptable (CFI > 0.80), according to Bentler, 1990 and Steiger, 1990 parameters.

From the exclusion of these three items in the confirmatory factor analysis, an exploratory factor analysis was used to confirm whether or not the items were still loading in a single one-factor. This was proved in all subscales with the exception of FCD. The scree plot suggested a two-factor solution and the items distributed by the two factors. As the following procedure qualitatively analyzed the content of each item, it was perceived that the FCD could be converted into FCD-A (items — 6, 14, 20, 30, 36, 46 and 48), which is made up of items more closely related to educational development and the involvement with the biological parents; on the other hand, FCD-B (items — 2, 12, 13, 19, 27, 33, 34 and 35) deals with issues more in tune with social development and transmission of rules. This means that the design of this questionnaire's subscales in the Portuguese reality is also composed of six subscales (in the pre-test the scale “Natural Families” was eliminate — KC).

3.4. Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha was use to assess the internal consistency reliability, i.e., the consistency with which each individual answers to the given items on a scale (Maroco, 2007).

By comparing these four studies, one perceives a degree of homogeneity. The main difference arises, in Portuguese study, in the WAC subscale (this scale has fewer items), which presents a marginal value when compared to other samples where the value is higher; however, the IFC subscale, which presents a higher value (Pinto, 2008) in others samples, had a marginal or poor level. These differences are easily understandable because a comparison is made between two different populations and because the Portuguese scale is reduced. One should also highlight that in all U.S. samples, the KC subscale (which was eliminated in the Portuguese sample during the pre-test phase) shows marginal values except for the female sample in Orme's study of 2007. Nonetheless, although several items were removed, the values on Portuguese scale are, in general, consistent and similar to those found in other studies Table 4.

Table 4
Cronbach's Alpha analysis.

Study	Excellent ≥0.80	Good 0.79–0.70	Marginal 0.69–0.60	Poor <0.60
Foster Mother's (Orme, Cuddeback, et al., 2006)	FCD, CC, CP	WAC	IFC, KC	
Foster Father's (Orme, Cherry, et al., 2006)	FCD, CP	CC, WAC	KC	IFC
Online (Orme, 2007)	FCD, CC, CP (both)	WAC (both) KC (women),	IFC(women)	KC (men) IFC (men)
Portuguese (Pinto, 2008)	FCD-B, CC, CP	IFC, FCD-A	WAC	

In many samples the majority of subscales have values that range from good to excellent in terms of Cronbach's alpha.

3.5. CFAI-A descriptive statistics and normality

Regarding the sensitivity of the questionnaire, one can see that only some subscales follow a normal distribution, if compared with the four samples. The IFC and KC subscales present this characteristic more often, but one cannot pinpoint a pattern.

From the results obtained, one realizes that, regarding that two groups have similar results considering skewness: the first two studies (Orme, Cuddeback, et al., 2006 and Orme, Cherry and Cox, 2006) present a predominant left skewness, which implies lower response values (the similarities may be attested because both members of the foster family were assessed), and the online study (Orme, 2007) with Portuguese study (Pinto, 2008), with skewness on the majority of the scales on the right (which implies responses with higher values, which could induce a more correct posture referring to social desirability). Regarding kurtosis, there are some similarities between all the studies, particularly in the WAC and IFC subscales, and, in some samples, the CC subscale presents a leptokurtic distribution. In the majority of samples, the FCD, CP and KC subscales have a platykurtic distribution.

3.6. Correlations between subscales

It can be noted that there are significant correlations ($p < .05$, two-tailed and $p < .01$, two-tailed) between most of the subscales. The following table (Table 5) describes the strong correlations (≥ 0.50) and the subscales that show no correlation (Pestana & Gageiro, 2005). In all other combinations of the subscales, there are significant correlations but with values lower than 0.50. In the three studies, the WAC subscale is the one that has fewer correlations with the remaining subscales, and only presents a strong correlation with the CC subscale on the Portuguese research (Pinto, 2008).

Table 5
Subscale correlations.

Study		Subscales without correlation	Strong correlations (>0.50)
Foster Mother's (Orme, Cuddeback, et al., 2006)		- WAC doesn't correlates with CP - CC doesn't correlates with KC and CP	- FCD and KC - FCD and CP
Online (Orme, 2007)	women		- FCD and KC - FCD and CP - FCD and IFC
	men	- WAC doesn't correlates with FCD, CP, IFC and KC	- IFC and CC - IFC and CC - FCD, CP and KC - FCD, IFC and KC
Portuguese (Pinto, 2008)		- WAC doesn't correlates with IFC and FCD-A	- FCD-A, FCD-B and CP - IFC and CP - WAC and CC

In all samples most of the subscales are correlated and there are several with strong correlations.

In Orme, Cuddeback, et al. (2006), the CC subscale also has fewer correlations when compared with the others.

On the Portuguese study (Pinto, 2008) it is possible to pinpoint three groups of correlations. The FCD-A, FCD-B and CP subscales, and the IFC and CP subscales correlate substantially; however, although the correlations between the subscales IFC and FCD-A, as well as the FCD-B are not as high as the rest (0.421 and 0.469, $p < .01$, two-tailed), one may qualitatively interpret that individuals (who are married and living with biological or adopted children) that are sensitive enough to understand the foster child's needs, will also manifest the same sensitiveness towards their spouse and will achieve a successful integration of the foster child with their own biological or adopted children.

On the WAC and CC subscales, the presence of a strong correlation is also highlighted, indicating that if the caretaker is capable of managing the problems of the foster child, the technician performing the monitoring process could intervene less, that the relationship remains satisfactory.

In all studies, the FCD subscale is the one with the most significant correlations with the remaining subscales, however there is no pattern of constant correlation between the several studies (in the Orme, Cherry, et al., 2006 study, this analysis wasn't done).

It appears that, depending on the samples and the way of filling the questionnaire out, some correlations arise and others disappear. Nonetheless, the subscales measure distinct constructs that are correlated significantly in a theoretical level and these six subscales clearly allow access to multiple aspects of the potential success of foster care (Orme, Cuddeback, et al., 2006 and Orme, 2007).

4. Conclusions

This article tried to assess whether or not the CFAI-A questionnaire had psychometric qualities similar to those found in the American studies and, thus, to consider whether or not this questionnaire could be used in the Portuguese reality. After a detailed comparative analysis, the conclusion is that the questionnaire has good psychometric qualities and the weaknesses could also be found on the other samples.

This questionnaire allows candidates to become aware of the reality of foster care (Orme, Cuddeback, et al., 2006) and it can be used to access areas that need to be developed and supported, and to identify the candidates' strengths in the path towards becoming a foster family. The answers given by the foster parents and collected in these studies translate the perception they have of their own skills, feelings and behaviours.

However, the questionnaire's results will not always correspond to the candidate's real potential, since external variables such as self-esteem, social desirability and support to fill out the questionnaire may compromise the results. The combination of standardized scales in the process is highly relevant (such as the CFAI-A, in which the results are presented by percentiles) as is the professional judgment, mainly because these measuring tools allow to draw conclusions quickly and to save money, time and effort.

In future studies, it will be important to realize whether or not the items had factor loading in more than one-factor solution, by crossing items from various subscales, in order to prove that they measure the construct originally intended, as well as carrying out a comparison of differences in means. In the study developed by Orme (2007), gender-related differences have emerged, and it was found that female participants had higher values, particularly in the FCD, IFC and CP subscales, which indicates that it is necessary to assess both elements, male and female, during the recruitment and formation process of foster families. It will be also interesting to adapt the worker version of this questionnaire, in order to allow for the joint work with both versions, thus obtaining more valid and well grounded results and conclusions.

Currently, an exploratory study is already being carried out with technicians from the social services and from Private Institutions of Social Solidarity in order to assess their view of the CFAI-A questionnaire, including strengths and weaknesses, as well as the usefulness given to this tool.

The essence of foster care is to accept difficult and/or problematic children in one's home, to manage contacts with the biological family, parents or other relatives, to work in a close association with the foster care technicians, with the final goal of reuniting the child with his/her biological parents (Triseliotis et al., 1995). Fulfilling such demanding and complex work requires preparation, initial training, monitoring and additional training, in order to increase the chances of success and to reinforce the status of foster parent.

Currently, it seems quite obvious that “knowledge and skills, combined with commitment, are more likely to lead to carers being successful, and hence finding the task rewarding” (Triseliotis et al., 1995, p.46). The *Casey Foster Applicant Inventory-Applicant Version* questionnaire (CFAI-A) is a tool which may help to improve the preparation and placement process, providing foster care teams with the necessary information to support and evaluate the placement of foster children, in order to assess its impact on the stability and development of the children and foster parents.

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