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Perspectives of unaccompanied refugee children, their foster carers and guardians on placement success: Which factors predict multi-informant discrepancies?

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ABSTRACT

This study examined multi-informant discrepancies (between child, carer, and guardian perspectives) regarding placement success of 39 foster placements, as well as possible factors associated with these discrepancies. We also examined whether these discrepancies in placement success at baseline measurement (T0) are related to placement breakdown at second measurement (T1). The results showed that when placements are rated with a high average *placement success* score (looking at child-carer and child-guardian dyads), the child and carer, as well as the child and guardian generally agree on the success of the foster placement, showing low discrepancy. In contrast, placements with a low average score on placement success show large discrepancies between the perspectives, which may also lead to breakdown. Results of the multilevel analyses showed that discrepancies regarding placement success were mainly associated with differences in perspectives regarding fostering factors (i.e., quality of the caregiving environment, child-carer and child-guardian relationship) and child factors (i.e., conduct problems, emotional problems). The results indicate that children and their carers or guardians disagree more on the success of the placement if they disagree on the quality of the caregiving environment, the child's conduct and emotional problems, and the quality of the child-carer and child-guardian relationship. The outcomes of our study might be especially helpful for guardians in shaping their guidance practices.

1. Introduction

Foster placements offer a substitute caregiving environment for children whose biological parents are unable to provide a safe home (Van Rooij, Maaskant, Weijers, Weijers, & Hermanns, 2015). They are often considered the preferred option for children in out-of-home care (Van Schoonlandt, Vanderfaeillie, Van Holen, De Maeyer, & Andries, 2012). Similarly, of unaccompanied refugee children (Wade, 2019), those in foster care[1] are faring best and are — according to research in the Netherlands (Kalverboer et al., 2016) — most positive about their place in society compared to children staying in other care facilities, such as small living units, children's living groups, and campuses. Nevertheless, reasons for entering foster care differ between unaccompanied refugee children and children in regular foster care (Crea, Lopez, Taylor, & Underwood, 2017; Van Holen, Blijkers, Trogh, West, & Vanderfaeillie, 2020), as do their needs and experiences (Wade, 2019).

Depending on the EU country where a refugee applies for asylum, different policies and practices towards refugees are in place (Bordignon & Moriconi, 2017; Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002). For example, some EU countries have no reception provisions within families for unaccompanied refugee children (De Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2015[2]). In the Netherlands, unaccompanied refugee children reside in different forms of care depending on their age, asylum status, needs and vulnerability (Zijlstra et al., 2017). Those under 15 years old are placed in foster care

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[1] Throughout this paper, foster care refers to the situation where children reside in a foster family, not in residential care.

[2] This source provides an overview of the foster care-provision for unaccompanied refugee children in all EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland.

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(Nidos, 2017). At the end of 2019, 1242 unaccompanied refugee children were residing in foster care in the Netherlands (Nidos, 2019). Nidos, the Dutch guardianship organisation for unaccompanied refugee children, generally tries to place children in a foster family with a similar cultural background (De Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2015; Spinder & Van Hout, 2008); if children cannot be placed in *kinship care* (family members or extended network), they can reside in *traditional foster care* (Spinder, Van Hout, & Hesser, 2010). Nidos arranges temporary child custody in the absence of parents or caregivers (Civil Code, Art. 1: 253r). Every unaccompanied refugee child is appointed a guardian who has legal responsibility for the child (De Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2015). The daily care is provided by foster carers, and the guardian – a social worker who visits the child and its foster family at least once every four weeks (Spinder et al., 2010) – intervenes if the care provided is not sufficient (Spinder & Van Hout, 2008). Tasks of guardians include for example juridical activities, such as preparing and accompanying the child in interviews as part of the asylum procedure and accompanying the child in meetings with the lawyer (Spinder & Van Hout, 2008, p. 27), as well as pedagogical tasks, such as supporting and stimulating the child in his/her personal development and to support the child in developing a strong social network (Spinder & Van Hout, 2008, p. 37).

The differences between unaccompanied refugee children and those in regular foster care, together with the limited research into the outcomes of foster placements for unaccompanied refugee children (Barrie & Mendes, 2011; Hek, 2007; Wade, Sirreyeh, Kohli, & Simmonds, 2012), indicate the need for a study that focusses solely on unaccompanied refugee children in foster care (Van Holen et al., 2020). The outcomes of a previous study (Rip, Zijlstra, Post, Kalverboer, & Knorth, 2020b) have contributed to the rationale for the current study. Results showed that children, foster carers and guardians may have different perspectives on the child's social-emotional well-being and success of the placement (see further below), and that, particularly for children, cultural similarity between a child and their carers was of great importance for placement success. This paper provides insight into what contributes to such differing perspectives, as well as whether these differing perspectives are associated with placement breakdown. Such knowledge might be helpful for guardians in shaping their guidance practices.

The literature review starts with a description of placement success, followed by information on placement breakdown. Lastly, we discuss how views on, for example, placement success can differ between all those concerned (so-called multi-informant discrepancies).

1.1. Placement success

Placement success is something that foster care agencies strive for — both in regular foster care and in foster care for unaccompanied children — as it is in the interest of all parties involved. Sinclair, Wilson, and Gibbs (2005, p. 7) mentioned that "… some foster placements clearly succeed: the foster children do well and are happy, they are loved in a way which does not threaten their relationships with their families, their behaviour improves, they get glowing reports from school …", whereas "… other placements just as clearly fail: behaviour gets worse, the child truants from school, the carer asks for the child to be removed". A good match between a child and a foster family might contribute to placement success (Brown & Campbell, 2007; Doelling & Johnson, 1990; Sinclair et al., 2005). Child characteristics and foster carer characteristics are also significant (Brown, 2008; Geiger, Piel, Lietz, & Julien-Chinn, 2016; Miller, Randle, & Dolnicar, 2019; Oke, Rostill-Brookes, & Larkin, 2013; Randle, 2013; Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). In our previous baseline study, we examined which child factors — such as past placement movements, social-emotional well-being and traumatic events experienced by the child — which fostering factors — such as the number of foster carers, foster carers' birth children and other foster children in the family, and the quality of the caregiving environment — and which cultural matching factors — such as cultural similarity between child and carers — contributed to placement success (for an overview of child and fostering factors, see Rip et al., 2020b). The results of that study showed that depending on the perspective (i.e., children's, carers' or guardians' perspective), different factors were associated with placement success (Rip et al., 2020b).

1.2. Placement breakdown

As foster placement stability (i.e., no placement breakdown) is seen as an indicator for successful foster placements, and perspectives on placement success may differ between those involved (Christiansen, Havik, & Anderssen, 2010; Sinclair et al., 2005), studying the relationship between differing perspectives on placement success and placement breakdown might provide relevant insights.

Foster placement breakdown is not uncommon (Vanderfaeillie, Van Holen, Carlier, & Fransen, 2018). In regular foster care, percentages of premature placement termination range from 20 up to 50 (Konijn et al., 2019). It should be noted, however, that most foster placement terminations are planned (see, for example, Van Rooij et al., 2015). For unaccompanied refugee children, few studies into placement termination or breakdown have been carried out. Van Holen et al. (2020) highlighted that only two relevant studies systematically examined characteristics associated with placement breakdown (i.e., Crea et al., 2017; Linowitz & Boothby, 1988).

A placement breakdown can be undesirable and upsetting for all parties involved — children, carers, and foster care agencies (Ni Raghallaigh, 2013; Vanderfaeillie et al., 2018). For children, a breakdown means losing their earlier social relations and may lead to difficulty trusting adults and an increase in behavioural problems (Strijker, Knorth, & Knot-Dickscheit, 2008; Van Rooij et al., 2015; Vanderfaeillie et al., 2018). For carers, a breakdown may demoralise foster carers, leading to termination of the fostering engagement (Vanderfaeillie et al., 2018). However, positive outcomes after placement breakdown are also reported: Luster et al. (2009) reported that some adults who reflected on their previous fostering experience stated that the breakdown resulted in more positive relationships.

1.3. Multi-informant discrepancies

The descriptive results of a previous study (Rip et al., 2020b) highlighted the subjective or personal valuation of placement success and the child's social emotional well-being: "… a few children reported very low scores on placement success, while their foster carers and guardians were more satisfied with the foster placement", and "… children reported having more social-emotional problems than were reported by foster carers and guardians about the child" (Rip et al., 2020b, p. 9). Apparently, in some cases, children and their carers and guardians perceived these factors or variables differently.

These discrepancies in reports between different informants cannot only be addressed as a measurement error; these discrepancies might yield important information on their own (De Los Reyes, 2011; Moens, Weeland, Van der Giessen, Chhangur, & Overbeek, 2018; Verhulst & Van der Ende, 1991). Recently, this 'shift in thinking' has been observed, in which discrepancies are regarded as

a meaningful phenomenon (Moens et al., 2018). In fact, De Los Reyes (2011, p. 8) states that "… we should only accept the idea that informant discrepancies do not contain useful information when data exist to support this idea". Previous research showed that multi-informant discrepancies predict negative outcomes that would not have been picked up when solely looking at the individual reports (De Los Reyes, 2011). As discrepancies between different informants' reports regarding psychopathology are not uncommon (Achenbach, 2006; De Los Reyes, 2011; Ferdinand, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2004), and vary "… in size and direction depending on the assessed behavior, instruments used and informant combinations" (Moens et al., 2018, p. 1147), it is important to study informant discrepancies and associated factors further.

We have not found discrepancy literature on foster placement

success; most of the discrepancy literature is related to child psychopathology (e.g., Israel, Thomsen, Langeveld, & Stormark, 2007; Ferdinand et al., 2004; Ferdinand, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2006), the quality of the parent–child relationship (e.g., Pelton & Forehand, 2001; Pelton, Steele, Chance, & Forehand, 2001), parenting behaviour (e.g., Guion, Mrug, & Windle, 2009), and teen driving (e.g., Beck, Hartos, & Simons-Morton, 2006). Moreover, most studies report on two informants (e.g., child-parent; clinician-parent; father-mother; teacher-parent), whereby discrepancies between perspectives often concern independent variables (hereafter called: factors) rather than outcome variables. In this study, however, we used three informants (i.e., child, carer and guardian) and the issue of multi-informant discrepancies has been included using the factors (e.g., discrepancy regarding the quality of the caregiving environment) as well as the outcome variable (i.e., discrepancy regarding placement success).

1.4. Research questions and conceptual model

The results of our previous study (Rip et al., 2020b) and the abovementioned literature raised our interest in what contributes to discrepancies regarding perspectives on placement success: if a child, carer and guardian show discrepancies with regard to their perspective on placement success, are these discrepancies related to cultural matching factors or discrepancies regarding child or fostering factors (R1)? Likewise, are these discrepancies between children, carers and guardians related to placement breakdown (R2; see Fig. 1)? The phases in the conceptual model refer to the specific research questions, as well as to the particular phase of the data-analysis (see Section 2.5).

2. Method

2.1. Design

For this study, we used data from the baseline study (T0; also analysed in Rip et al., 2020b) and second measurement (T1) of our ongoing longitudinal observational study consisting of three measurements. Data were collected from unaccompanied refugee children and their foster carers and guardians between November 2018 and January 2019 (T0) and again between November 2019 and January 2020 (T1).

2.2. Participants

Participants were recruited with the help of Nidos. Unaccompanied refugee children between 10 and 16 years old, who had been living with their foster families for 3 to 24 months, who were not born in the Netherlands, and who were not living with foster carers who had raised them in the country of origin, were recruited. Moreover, only one child per foster family could participate. Carers and guardians were only asked to participate after the child agreed to participate in the longitudinal study (for a detailed description of the selection procedure, see Rip et al., 2020b).

Baseline study (T0). At T0, the study sample consisted of 39 unaccompanied refugee children, 37 carers and 37 guardians. The children came from 15 countries of origin, had a mean age of 14.7 (SD = 1.6), and most of them were Christian (46%) or Muslim (44%). Most of the children lived in a traditional foster placement (62%) and were raised by one foster carer (64%). At time of baseline data collection, children had spent an average of 21 months in the Netherlands, and most of them (69%) had lived at more than one place since arriving in the Netherlands. Without providing a reason, two carers and two guardians did not participate at baseline measurement, while their child did participate. As there were only three cases in which both foster carers participated in our study, we only used the data of one of the foster carers (i.e. the foster carer who was asked to provide most of the information).

Second measurement (T1). Although participants were explicitly asked for participation in a longitudinal study, several children (n = 11) no longer participated at T1. Reasons included: the child preferred to focus on school, the child had left the family with an unknown destination, the child had no time or too much on their mind, or the child was not granted a residence permit and had to leave the country. Consequently, at T1, 28 children participated[3]; eight of them experienced a placement termination between T0 and T1. In the case of children who experienced placement termination (except those reunited with their biological family), their *former* foster carers and both former and current guardians were asked why, and are thus seen as participants in this study at T1. Unfortunately, we were unable to reach all of the *former* carers and guardians; in those cases, we only used the available responses.

2.3. Measures

In the following paragraph, we present the measures for the outcome variables and independent variables, whereby, for all discrepancy variables, first the measure and the range of the original scores of that measure will be discussed, followed by a description of the change scores for the particular measure.

2.3.1. Outcome variables

2.3.1.1. Discrepancy regarding placement success. As all participants were asked to rate the extent to which they were satisfied with the foster placement (score between 0 and 10), a difference score (i.e., operationalisation of discrepancy between participants) on placement success was created for child and carer as well as for child and guardian. All of the difference scores are built up similarly: the carer or guardian's original score (i.e., the score per perspective) was subtracted from the child's original score. For example, when the child rated the placement success with a score of 7, and their carer gave it a score of 8, the *placement success difference score* $_{child\text{-}carer}$[4] was −1.

2.3.1.2. Placement breakdown. To gain insight into placement breakdown (which we regard as the negative course of a foster placement leading to placement termination), reasons for placement termination were assessed based on all perspectives (i.e. the child, carers and guardians' perspectives). However, this was only done when the child participated during the second measurement round (T1). Children and guardians were asked these questions via the questionnaire, whereas *former* carers and *former* guardians were asked the same questions by telephone.

In contrast to Vanderfaeillie et al. (2018, p. 212), placement terminations 'unconnected to the studied foster care placement', such as relocation of foster carers or a relationship breakup of the carers, were also identified as placement breakdown. This was done because we regarded this as the negative course of a foster placement, and we hypothesised that such terminations could potentially have negative consequences for future placements or the child's well-being (Strijker et al., 2008).

2.3.2. Discrepancy factors and cultural matching factors related to the placement success difference score

2.3.2.1. Discrepancy regarding child factors. The child's social-emotional well-being was assessed with the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; see www.sdqinfo.org) according to all perspectives, namely that of the child (via the SDQ self-report), the carer and the

[3] In fact, 29 children participated, since we asked one participant of which we lost data at T0 (but whose carer and guardian participated), to rejoin at T1. Data from this participant and their carer and guardian were not used in this study.

[4] For readability, the dyads are referred to in subscript.

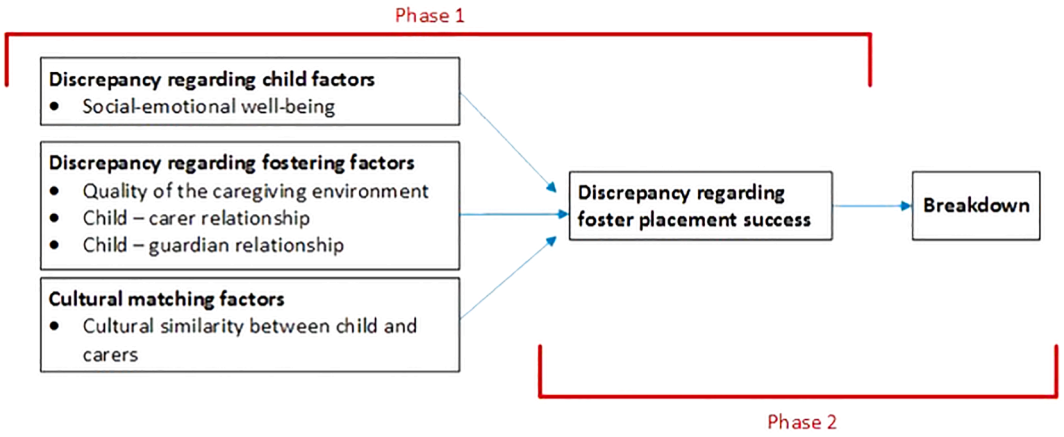

Fig. 1. Conceptual model: possible factors associated with multi-informant discrepancies regarding foster placement success and how they relate to breakdown.

guardian (via the SDQ parent or teacher version). The SDQ consists of 25 items, with three response categories (i.e., not true, somewhat true, and certainly true), assessing the child's social-emotional well-being and its influence on their daily life. The five subscales of the questionnaire (emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems, prosocial behaviour), each consisting of five items with a subscale range from 0 to 10, are also used in this study, as well as the 'total difficulties' score. The 'total difficulties' score (0–40) is a sum of all subscales except the subscale 'prosocial behaviour' (Goodman & Goodman, 2009). The 'internalising behaviour' score (sum of 'emotional problems' and 'peer problems') and 'externalising behaviour' score (sum of 'conduct problems' and 'hyperactivity') were also used in this study. The higher the score on the SDQ, the more problems were reported regarding the child.

As the child's social-emotional well-being was assessed based on all perspectives, difference scores were created for the total scores, the subscale scores, and the internalising and externalising behaviour scores of the SDQ.

2.3.2.2. Discrepancy regarding fostering factors. The quality of the caregiving environment was assessed from all perspectives with the Best Interest of the Child (BIC) questionnaire (Kalverboer & Zijlstra, 2006; Zijlstra, 2012). The questionnaire consists of 14 items with four response categories (i.e., unsatisfactory [0], moderate [1], satisfactory [2], good [3]), each referring to a condition for optimal child development. A total score, which can range from 0 to 42, was used for this study. The higher the score, the higher the quality of the caregiving environment. Furthermore, children and their carers were asked to rate the quality of their relationship (score between 0 and 10). The child-guardian relationship was similarly assessed.

As the quality of the caregiving environment was assessed based on all perspectives, difference scores were created from the total scores of the BIC questionnaire. Two other variables were assessed based on two perspectives, namely the child-carer relationship and the child-guardian relationship; difference scores were also created for these variables.

When children had a higher original score than carers, it resulted in a positive difference score, whereas a negative difference score indicated the opposite. Depending on the variable, this should be interpreted differently. For example, a higher original score on the BIC (the quality of the caregiving environment) indicates higher quality. In contrast, a higher original score on the SDQ (social-emotional problems) indicates more problems and is thus negative. Consequently, a negative difference score on the SDQ indicates that the child reports less social-emotional problems than the carer. A negative difference score on the BIC indicates that the child is less positive about the quality of the caregiving environment than their carers.

2.3.2.3. Cultural matching factors. In this study, we used the most 'promising' cultural matching factor[5], namely the 'cultural similarity' score, from our previous study (Rip et al., 2020b).

Cultural similarity between child and carers was assessed using data from children and carers. The total cultural similarity score could vary between 0 and 3, as each cultural aspect (i.e., country of origin, native language, religion) counted for one point. An average score per aspect was used when the child was raised by two carers. For example, if the child and one of the carers came from Eritrea, and the other carer came from Ethiopia, the average score for cultural similarity with regard to the country of origin was 0.5. The higher the average 'cultural similarity' score, the higher the cultural similarity between child and carers. We only used the total score if all aspects contributing to the total score were known.

As the 'cultural similarity' score may reflect a discrepancy between the child and carers with regard to cultural aspects, it (referred to as an original score) is also used in this study. However, it does not reflect different perspectives on the same phenomenon (such as the views of the child, carer and guardian on the quality of the caregiving environment).

2.4. Procedure

Data collection from children and their carers was done via home visits. Two researchers visited the foster home and — with the participants' consent — the 'interviews' were held in separate rooms. Participants were asked for informed consent before completing the questionnaires on a tablet in the presence of a researcher. Participants were offered telephone interpreters from the Netherlands Interpreting and Translation Centre (TVcN), and could also use English, Tigrinya or Arabic translations of the questionnaires. The questionnaires took approximately 2 h for children and 1.5 h for carers. After participation, children received a gift card, and carers were given chocolate. The participating children's guardians were then asked to complete a 30-minute digital questionnaire (the procedure is described more extensively in Rip et al., 2020b). This process was similar for the baseline measurement (T0) and second measurement (T1).

2.5. Data analysis

Contrary to the baseline study (Rip et al., 2020b), the present study focused on discrepancies (using difference scores) between children and their carer or guardian. As addressed in Section 2.3.2.3., the 'cultural

[5] In our previous study (Rip et al., 2020b), we included three cultural matching factors: 1) cultural similarity between child and carer (also used in the current study), 2) similarity in acculturation strategies between child and carer, and 3) traditional versus kinship placement.

similarity' between child and carers is the only factor consisting of an original score, while the other factors are all difference scores. All difference scores are between child and carer and/or child and guardian.

2.5.1. Phase 1

'If a child, carer and guardian show discrepancies with regard to their perspective on placement success, are these discrepancies related to cultural matching factors or discrepancies regarding child or fostering factors?' (R1)

2.5.1.1. Descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were calculated. Discrepancies regarding the outcome variable and independent variables (hereafter called: factors) were presented *per dyad* (i.e., child-carer, child-guardian, carer-guardian) (referred to as 'descriptives [uncategorised data]'). Discrepancies were also categorised as 'low or no discrepancy' and 'high discrepancy'; as they had different ranges, different cut-off points for 'high discrepancy' were used, depending on the type of variable assessed (referred to as 'per dyad [categorised data]'). As the placements with 'no discrepancy at all' between dyads (i.e. difference score of zero) were also of interest to us, these results were also presented.

Furthermore, the *placement success score* is subjected to a Bland Altman plot analysis (Bland & Altman, 1986). For each family, the mean (*M*) of the two perspectives' *placement success scores* is plotted in relation to the *placement success difference scores* for the same two perspectives (i.e. child-carer; child-guardian). Under normality assumptions, it is expected that 95% of the points lie between the limits of agreement (difference scores = M ± 2SD) (Bland & Altman, 1986). Too many points outside the limits of agreement indicate no agreement between both perspectives.

We then analysed discrepancies regarding the outcome variable and factors *per placement* — between all participants within one family (i.e., child-carer-guardian). To identify placements with high or low discrepancy with one or both parties, crosstabs were made with the categorisation of the *difference score* $_{child\text{-}carer}$ and the *difference score* $_{child\text{-}guardian}$ for all factors (except cultural similarity), as well as for the outcome variable. The highest percentages per measure (or subscale) are discussed (referred to as 'per placement [categorised data]').

2.5.1.2. Testing statistics. Multilevel analyses using MLwiN 3.04 were conducted to test which factors relate to the placement success difference scores between all parties. As observations in the same foster family are not independent (Hair & Fávero, 2019), multilevel analyses techniques take into account the nested structure of the data (measurements of children, their foster carers and guardians within the same families or placements) (Snijders & Bosker, 2012). The lowest level of the hierarchy (level 1) consists of 'within-family data'. The highest level (level 2) consists of 'between-family data'.

First, bivariate analyses between each factor and the outcome variables were performed by building an empty model with only the intercept to inform about the unexplained variation within and between families. Each factor was tested by adding it to the empty model separately.

Second, we built a random intercept model with *placement success difference scores* as the outcome variable, whereby significantly related factors from the bivariate analyses (hereafter called 'promising factors') were included one-by-one and checked for significance of parameter estimate and difference in deviance (Snijders & Bosker, 2012). SDQ measurements (one part of the factors) can be categorised in three sets of variables: 1) SDQ total score, 2) SDQ internalising and externalising behaviour, and 3) SDQ subscales. Due to the high correlation between these sets, three separate models were built containing the promising factors, with one of the 'SDQ sets'. When the outcomes of these models were comparable, a selection was made based on substantive grounds. Model assumptions (distribution of residuals and normality) are visually checked for the final models using caterpillar plots (Goldstein & Healy, 1995) on level 1 and level 2.

2.5.2. Phase 2

'Are discrepancies regarding placement success between children, carers and guardians related to placement breakdown?' (R2)

Because we solely analysed placement termination data from those who participated at T1, the group that did not participate at T1 (n = 11) and the final sample at T1 (n = 28) were compared according to the *placement success difference score* $_{child\text{-}carer}$ and the *placement success difference score* $_{child\text{-}guardian}$ using independent sample *t*-tests to check whether the 'complete cases' were similar to the 'drop-outs'.

Regarding the eight placements terminated after the baseline study (T0), two researchers (SH; JR) identified separately, based on the responses of the different parties, which of these placements had an undesirable development leading to placement termination (i.e. placement breakdown). The final categorisation of reasons for placement termination was discussed with two of the authors (WP; EZ), and all researchers agreed. The results include an overview of reasons for foster placement termination, as well as insight into the children's new living situation at T1. For placements identified as placement breakdown, the difference scores were then further inspected to see if large differences on the outcome variable or factors could be found. We also checked whether the points outside the limits of agreement in the Bland Altman plots corresponded with the placements identified as placement breakdown.

3. Results

3.1. Phase 1

3.1.1. Descriptive results

3.1.1.1. Placement success difference score. Descriptives (uncategorised data). Regarding placement success, the baseline study (Rip et al., 2020b) showed that, overall, children (M = 8.64, SD = 2.42), carers (M = 9.32, SD = 1.16), and guardians (M = 8.27, SD = 1.37) were positive. The average *placement success difference score* $_{child\text{-}carer}$ was −0.41 (SD = 1.62), and the average *placement success difference score* $_{child\text{-}guardian}$ was 0.46 (SD = 1.77). This indicates that, on average, children and carers, and children and guardians, differed to a similar extent in their assessment of placement success. However, the direction was different, whereby the *placement success difference score* $_{child\text{-}carer}$ was negative, indicating that children were more negative than their carers, while the *placement success difference score* $_{child\text{-}guardian}$ was positive (see Table 1 for more details).

Bland Altman plots (uncategorised data). Both Bland Altman plots (see Fig. 2) showed some points outside the limits of agreement (2 × SD = 3.24 for the child-carer dyad, and 2 × SD = 2.38 for the child-guardian dyad). Notable is that the points farthest left in the plots (indicating a low mean score on placement success for the child and the second party, i.e., carer or guardian) were placements in which children largely disagreed with carers or guardians; these points were also outside the limits of agreement. The points on the right of the plot (above a mean placement score of approximately 7.5) did not show a clear pattern, meaning that there was no clear trend between the mean score of the placement and the difference score when both child and the second party (carer or guardian) were relatively positive about the placement.

The upper plot, containing data of the child-carer dyad, showed three points outside of the limits of agreement. Two of these points (those below Mean – 2 SD) reflected a placement in which the child was far more negative than the carer about placement success (both difference scores were −5); though the relatively high mean child-carer placement

Table 1
Descriptives of difference scores and original scores of the outcome variable and independent variables (N = 39 placements).[a]

Factors	Variables*	Difference scores						Original scores								
		Child-carer difference score (N = 37)			Child-guardian difference score (N = 37)			Child's perspective (N = 39)			Carer's perspective (N = 37)			Guardian's perspective (N = 37)		
		M (SD)	*Mdn*	*Min-Max*	*M (SD)*	*Mdn*	*Min-Max*	*M (SD)*	*Mdn*	*Min-Max*	*M (SD)*	*Mdn*	*Min-Max*	*M (SD)*	*Mdn*	*Min-Max*
	Placement success	−0.41 (1.62)	0	−5;3	0.46 (1.77)	1	−5;4	8.64 (2.42)	10	0;10	9.32 (1.16)	10	5;10	8.27 (1.37)	8	4;10
Child factors	Social-emotional problems (SDQ total score)	2.24 (8.01)	2	−22;20	1.81 (7.55)	3	−18;13	9.79 (5.81)	10	1;25	7.38 (6.20)	6	0;27	7.70 (6.45)	6	0;27
	Internalising behaviour	1.35 (4.39)	2	−9;10	1.54 (4.15)	2	−6;10	5.95 (3.89)	5	0;14	4.43 (3.33)	4	0;12	4.22 (3.50)	4	0;14
	Externalising behaviour	.89 (4.76)	0	−13;11	.27 (4.71)	0	−14;8	3.85 (3.05)	3	0;13	2.95 (3.50)	2	0;16	3.49 (3.86)	3	0;17
	Emotional problems	1.11 (2.86)	1	−7;7	.86 (2.73)	1	−6;6	3.77 (2.61)	4	0;10	2.59 (2.22)	2	0;7	2.73 (2.70)	2	0;10
	Conduct problems	.51 (2.01)	1	−5;4	.32 (1.94)	0	−6;4	1.31 (1.34)	1	0;5	0.81 (1.37)	0	0;6	0.97 (1.66)	0	0;7
	Hyperactivity	.38 (3.41)	0	−8;8	−.05 (3.40)	0	−8;6	2.54 (2.22)	2	0;8	2.14 (2.43)	2	0;10	2.51 (2.58)	2	0;10
	Peer problems	.24 (2.54)	0	−6;6	.68 (2.38)	1	−5;5	2.18 (1.90)	2	0;8	1.84 (1.92)	1	0;6	1.49 (1.50)	2	0;6
	Prosocial behaviour	.86 (2.28)	1	−6;4	.65 (2.53)	0	−5;7	9.10 (1.37)	10	4;10	8.30 (1.63)	8	6;10	8.46 (2.10)	9	2;10
Fostering factors	Quality of the caregiving environment	−2.65 (7.12)	−1	−27;7	1.51 (7.19)	1	−17;15	36.54 (7.32)	39	6;42	39.41 (2.77)	40	33;42	35.49 (5.26)	37	23;42
	Child-carer relationship	0.38 (1.61)	0	−4;4				9.16[b] (1.97)	10	0;10	8.76 (1.53)	9	4;10			
	Child-guardian relationship				1.57 (1.77)	2	−3;4	8.90 (2.06)	10	0;10				7.62 (0.72)	8	6;9

Note. Some questions were not presented to all parties, resulting in some empty fields in the tables. Calculation of difference score: child's score minus carer or guardian's score.

* Ranges per variable. Placement success, child-carer relationship and child-guardian relationship, SDQ subscales: 0–10 (original score), −10 to 10 (difference score). SDQ internalising (i.e. emotional problems + peer problems)/externalising (i.e. conduct problems + hyperactivity) behaviour: 0–20 (original score), −20 to 20 (difference score). Social-emotional problems total score: 0–40 (original score), −40 to 40 (difference score). Quality of the caregiving environment: 0–42 (original score), −42 to 42 (difference score).

[a] Two carers and two guardians of the 39 foster placements did not participate. As such, the child-carer and child-guardian difference scores both reflect 37 placements.

[b] 1 missing.

success score (6.5) revealed that the carer was very positive about the placement success in this placement. The other point (the one above Mean + 2 SD) reflected a placement in which the child was far more positive than their carer, as shown by the difference score of 3. In this placement, carer and guardian rated the placement success similarly. The bottom plot, containing data of the child-guardian dyad, also showed three points outside the limits of agreement. Similar to the data of the child-carer dyad, children were far more negative than guardians in two placements (difference scores of −4 and −5). The other point reflected a placement in which the child was far more positive than the guardian (difference score of 4). In one of the placements, the child largely disagreed with both carer and guardian on the placement success, as reflected by the scores outside the limits of agreement in both plots. Moreover, in two of the placements that scored outside the limits of agreement, 'the other party' (carer or guardian) did not participate.

Per dyad (categorised data). The results showed that in almost half of the participating placements (49%), there was no discrepancy at all between *child and carer* on placement success, meaning the child and carer rated the placement success similarly (i.e. difference score of zero) (see Table 2). The dyads (i.e. child-guardian; carer-guardian) showed more discrepancy with regard to placement success, though in most placements, *child and guardian*, and *carer and guardian*, differed by one point at most (i.e. placements with low discrepancy: n = 15, 41% and n = 16, 46%, resp.). In a large number of placements (71%), *carer and guardian* also largely agreed on the placement success (i.e. low or no discrepancy).

Per placement (categorised data). Looking closer at the outcomes per placement (n = 35, 2 missing; see table 3), comparing the *placement success difference scores* $_{child\text{-}carer}$ with the *placement success difference scores* $_{child\text{-}guardian}$, the results showed that most placements have low or no discrepancy between child and carer, as well as child and guardian (n = 18, 51%), followed by placements whereby there is high discrepancy with one party (carer or guardian), and low or no discrepancy with the other party (n = 12, 34%). Here, the discrepancy is predominantly between child and guardian (n = 8), with the child being more positive than the guardian. A few placements exhibit high discrepancy between child and carer, as well as between child and guardian (n = 5, 14%[6]). In all placements where the child is more positive about the placement success than the carer and guardian (n = 3), carer and guardian fully agreed with regard to placement success.

3.1.1.2. Factors associated with discrepancy regarding foster placement success. Descriptives (uncategorised data). The mean cultural similarity score between children and carers in our sample was 1.64 (SD = 1.19, median = 2, min–max = 0–3). Table 1 presents the difference scores of

[6] Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

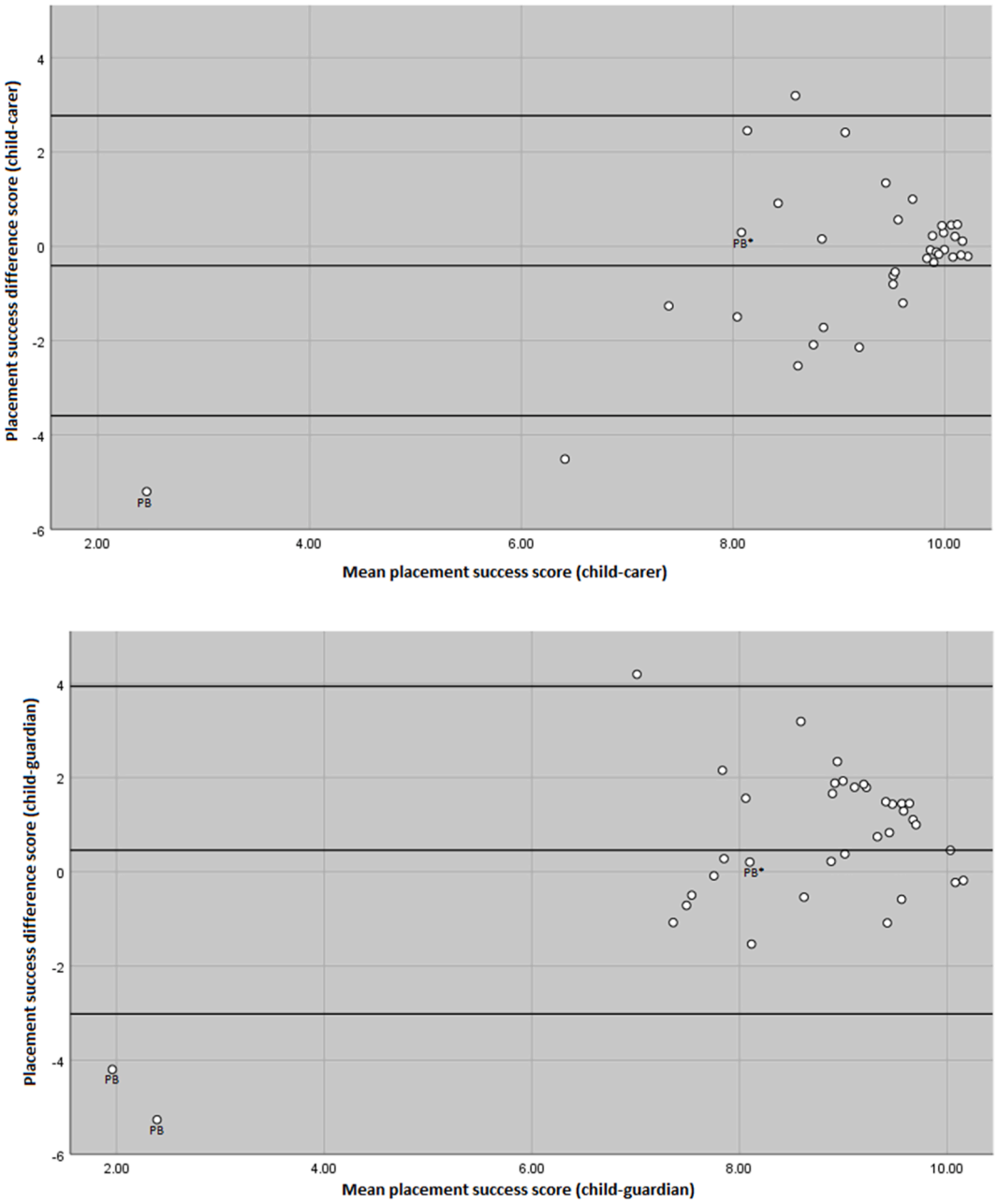

Fig. 2. Bland-Altman plots of the outcome variables. *Note.* The black line in the middle shows the Mean difference score. The other two black lines represent the limits of agreement of the difference score (Mean ± 2SD; Bland & Altman, 1986). PB = placement breakdown. PB* = placement breakdown related to external factors. Upper plot: Missing data from one placement breakdown (no results from carer).

the factors assessed, as well as the original scores. The outcomes highlight that, on average, children and carers, as well as children and guardians, differed more with regard to *internalising problems* (M = 1.35 and M = 1.54, resp.) than with regard to *externalising problems* (M = 0.89 and M = 0.27, resp.). For children and carers, as well as children and guardians, on average, the largest differences were noticed for the *emotional problems* subscale when comparing the outcomes of the different subscales. On average, the data regarding the *quality of the caregiving environment* showed more discrepancy for children and carers (M = −2.65, SD = 7.12) than for children and guardians (M = 1.51, SD = 7.19). However, the direction was different, whereby the *quality of the caregiving environment difference score* $_{child\text{-}carer}$ was negative, indicating that children were more negative than their carers, while the *quality of the caregiving environment difference score* $_{child\text{-}guardian}$ was positive. Furthermore, on average, the data regarding *the quality of the relationship* showed more discrepancy for children and guardians (M = 1.57, SD = 1.77) than for children and carers (M = 0.38, SD = 1.61).

Per dyad (categorised data). In the following paragraph, we solely discuss remarkable outcomes per measure or subscale (i.e. percentages of 65% or above) or remarkable outcomes whereby there was 'no discrepancy at all' between dyads (i.e. percentages of 35% or above). The discrepancies per dyad (see Table 2) showed that children and carers largely agreed (i.e. low or no discrepancy) on the *quality of the caregiving environment* (73%)[7] and *quality of the child-carer relationship*

[7] Due to several outliers in the data on the quality of the caregiving environment from children, the uncategorised data (per dyad) showed contrasting outcomes with the categorised data, as the categorised data are less sensitive to outliers.

Table 2
Overview of the discrepancies per dyad on outcome variable and independent variables: child-carer, child-guardian, and carer-guardian.

Variables	Measures	Subscale	Child-carer discrepancy (n = 37)		Child-guardian discrepancy (n = 37)		Carer-guardian discrepancy (n = 35)	
			Placements with low or no discrepancy between child and carer N(%)	Placements with high discrepancy between child and carer N(%)	Placements with low or no discrepancy between child and guardian N(%)	Placements with high discrepancy between child and guardian N(%)	Placements with low or no discrepancy between carer and guardian N(%)	Placements with high discrepancy between carer and guardian N(%)
Placement success	Placement success		**27 (73%)** *18 (49%)**	10 (27%)	23 (62%) *8 (22%)*	14 (38%)	**25 (71%)** *9 (26%)*	10 (29%)
Quality of the caregiving environment	BIC total score		**27 (73%)** *7 (19%)*	10 (27%)	17 (46%) *2 (5%)*	20 (54%)	20 (57%) *4 (11%)*	15 (43%)
Social-emotional well-being	SDQ Total Score		14 (38%) *3 (8%)*	23 (62%)	17 (46%) *2 (5%)*	20 (54%)	15 (43%) *0 (0%)*	20 (57%)
	SDQ Internalising/ Externalising behaviour	Internalising behaviour	17 (46%) *5 (14%)*	20 (54%)	16 (43%) *2 (5%)*	21 (57%)	12 (34%) *2 (6%)*	**23 (66%)**
		Externalising behaviour	20 (54%) *7 (19%)*	17 (46%)	13 (35%) *6 (16%)*	**24 (65%)**	19 (54%) *8 (23%)*	16 (46%)
	SDQ Subscales	Emotional problems	12 (32%) *3 (8%)*	**25 (68%)**	12 (32%) *4 (11%)*	**25 (68%)**	13 (37%) *8 (23%)*	22 (63%)
		Conduct problems	20 (54%) *10 (27%)*	17 (46%)	23 (62%) *10 (27%)*	14 (38%)	**28 (80%)** *16 (46%)**	7 (20%)
		Hyperactivity	17 (46%) *8 (22%)*	20 (54%)	14 (38%) *5 (14%)*	23 (62%)	15 (43%) *6 (17%)*	20 (57%)
		Peer problems	20 (54%) *8 (22%)*	17 (46%)	13 (35%) *6 (16%)*	**24 (65%)**	17 (49%) *7 (20%)*	18 (51%)
		Prosocial behaviour	17 (46%) *11 (30%)*	20 (54%)	22 (59%) *14 (38%)**	15 (41%)	17 (49%) *6 (17%)*	18 (51%)
Relationships	Child-carer relationship		**25 (68%)** *14 (38%)**	12 (32%)				
	Child-guardian relationship				10 (27%) *3 (8%)*	**27 (73%)**		

Note. BIC: Best Interest of the Child questionnaire. SDQ: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. 10% of the total range is used as a cut-off point between low and high discrepancy. No discrepancy = difference score of 0 (in italics). Low discrepancy = placement success, socioemotional well-being subscales: two parties differ by maximum 1 point; social-emotional well-being total score, quality of the caregiving environment: two parties differ by maximum 4 points; social-emotional well-being internalising/externalising behaviour: two parties differ by maximum 2 points. Much discrepancy = placement success, social-emotional well-being subscales: $-1 >$ or > 1; social-emotional well-being total score, quality of the caregiving environment: $-4 >$ or > 4; social-emotional well-being internalising/externalising behaviour: $-2 >$ or > 2. Bold = results 65% or higher. Italic* = results 35% or higher. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

(68%). Remarkably, in 14 placements (38%) children and carers fully agreed on the *quality of the child-carer relationship* (outcome in italics in Table 2). Children and carers largely disagreed (i.e. 'high discrepancy') with regard to *emotional problems* (68%). Children and guardians predominantly disagreed concerning the *quality of the child-guardian relationship* (73%) — whereby guardians generally rated the *child-guardian relationship* lower — and several social-emotional well-being variables, namely *emotional problems* (68%), *externalising problems* (65%), and *peer problems* (65%). In 14 placements (38%) children and guardians fully agreed on the child's *prosocial behaviour* (outcome in italics in Table 2). Carers and guardians largely agreed on the child's *conduct problems* (80%); remarkably, in 46% of placements, carers and guardians *fully* agreed (results in italics) on the level of conduct problems. Carers and guardians predominantly disagreed on the child's *internalising behaviour* (66%).

Per placement (categorised data). We looked closer at the differences within placements (n = 35) with regard to the factors, comparing the difference scores $_{child–carer}$ with the difference scores $_{child–guardian}$ (see Table 3). The results showed that there was predominantly 'low or no discrepancy with both the carer and guardian' with regard to the factors *quality of the caregiving environment* (46%) and *conduct problems* (49%). Most discrepancies in placements showing 'high discrepancy with one party (carer or guardian) and low or no discrepancy with the other party' predominantly concern *internalising problems* (57%), *hyperactivity* (57%), *peer problems* (54%), the *SDQ total score* (46%), *prosocial behaviour* (43%), and *externalising problems* (40%). Discrepancies in placements where there was 'high discrepancy with both the carer and guardian' were predominantly seen for *emotional problems* (46%). Further analyses highlight that in placements where there is 'high discrepancy with both parties', children generally scored higher than carers or guardians, indicating more social-emotional problems.

3.1.2. Bivariate analyses

In the bivariate analyses, all factors were tested in relation to the outcome variable (placement success difference score), resulting in a set of promising factors (in descending order of significance): quality of the caregiving environment difference score, child-carer relationship difference score, social-emotional well-being difference scores (SDQ total score; externalising problems; conduct problems; emotional problems; internalising problems; hyperactivity), cultural similarity between child and carer, social-emotional well-being difference score (prosocial behaviour), and child-guardian relationship difference score.

3.1.3. Empty model and final model

Due to multicollinearity between the *quality of the caregiving environment difference score* and the *child-carer relationship difference score,* these factors were not included together in one model. Therefore, model 1 was built with the *quality of the caregiving environment difference score* and each of the '*SDQ set*' (see 2.5.1.2.), leading to a final model 1 consisting of the *quality of the caregiving environment difference score* and *conduct problems difference score.* Model 2 was built with the *child-carer relationship difference score, child-guardian relationship difference score* and each of the *'SDQ set'*. As model 2 showed similar outcomes for each of the three 'SDQ sets', the SDQ subscales *emotional problems* and *conduct problems* were chosen for the final model 2, as these variables also showed interesting outcomes in the descriptive statistics. Table 4 shows

Table 3
Overview of the discrepancies on outcome variable and independent variables per placement (n = 35).

Variables	Measures	Subscale	Child-carer *and* child-guardian discrepancy (n = 35)		
			Placements with low or no discrepancy between child and carer, as well as child and guardian N (%)	Placements whereby there is high discrepancy with one party (carer or guardian), and low or no discrepancy with the other party N (%)	Placements whereby there is high discrepancy with both carer and guardian N (%)
Placement success	Placement success		**18 (51%)**	12 (34%)	5 (14%)
Quality of the caregiving environment	BIC total score		**16 (46%)**	11 (31%)	8 (23%)
Social-emotional well-being	SDQ Total Score		7 (20%)	**16 (46%)**	12 (34%)
	SDQ Internalising/ Externalising behaviour	Internalising behaviour	6 (17%)	**20 (57%)**	9 (26%)
		Externalising behaviour	9 (26%)	**14 (40%)**	12 (34%)
	SDQ Subscales	Emotional problems	4 (11%)	15 (43%)	**16 (46%)**
		Conduct problems	**17(49%)**	7 (20%)	11 (31%)
		Hyperactivity	5 (14%)	**20 (57%)**	10 (29%)
		Peer problems	7 (20%)	**19 (54%)**	9 (26%)
		Prosocial behaviour	11 (31%)	**15 (43%)**	9 (26%)

Note. BIC: Best Interest of the Child questionnaire. SDQ: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding. Low or no discrepancy = placement success, social-emotional well-being subscales: −1 to 1; social-emotional well-being total score, quality of the caregiving environment: −4 to 4; social-emotional well-being internalising/externalising behaviour: −2 to 2. Much discrepancy = placement success, social-emotional well-being subscales: −1 > or > 1; social-emotional well-being total score, quality of the caregiving environment: −4 > or > 4; social-emotional well-being internalising/externalising behaviour: −2 > or > 2. Bold = highest percentage per measure or subscale.

Table 4
Multilevel models representing significant factors in relation to placement success difference scores.

Parameter	Empty model 1	Final model 1	Empty model 2	Final model 2
Fixed effects				
Intercept	−0.068 (0.264)	0.136 (0.189)	0.186 (0.232)	−0.143 (0.218)
Quality of the caregiving environment difference scores		0.143 (0.019)		
Conduct problems difference scores		−0.211 (0.080)		−0.195 (0.080)
Child-carer relationship difference scores				0.239 (0.119)
Child-guardian relationship difference scores				0.269 (0.098)
Emotional problems difference scores				−0.132 (0.056)
Random parameters				
Level 2: Placement units				
Unexplained variance level 2	2.116 (0.629)	1.036 (0.310)	1.366 (0.468)	0.440 (0.242)
Level 1: Measurements within placements				
Unexplained variance level 1	1.105 (0.264)	0.555 (0.133)	1.043 (0.249)	0.920 (0.220)
Units: Placement units	39	39	35	35
Units: Measurements within placements	74	74	70	70
Deviance	276.789	225.072	246.604	216.337

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. Empty model 1 and final model 1 are based on 39 placements but have two missing values on the *placement success difference score* $_{child\text{-}carer}$ and two missing values on the *placement success difference score* $_{child\text{-}guardian}$. Empty model 2 and final model 2 are based on 35 placements, as both the *child-carer relationship difference score* and the *child-guardian relationship difference score* had two missing values.

both empty models and final models.

Empty model 1 has a total unexplained variance value of 3.221 and an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of 0.66, which means that 66% of the total variability is due to the variability between placements. By adding the variables *quality of caregiving environment difference score* and *conduct problems difference score* to empty model 1, the unexplained variance decreased by 1.08 on level 2 and 0.55 on level 1, leading to a final model 1 with a total unexplained variance of 1.591 and an ICC value of 0.65.

Empty model 2 has an unexplained variance value of 2.409 and an ICC value of 0.57. By adding the variables *conduct problems difference scores, child-carer relationship difference scores, child-guardian relationship difference scores,* and *emotional problems difference scores,* the unexplained variance decreased by 0.926 on level 2 and 0.123 on level 1, leading to a final model 2 with a total unexplained variance of 1.36 and an ICC value of 0.32. The final models show a significant decrease in deviance in both model 1 (51.717 points, p-value = 0.00 over 2 df) and model 2 (30.267 points, p-value < 0.01 over 4 df).

Both final models suggest that differences in perspectives regarding placement success were mainly associated with differences in perspectives regarding fostering factors (quality of the caregiving environment, relationships between child and carer or guardian) and child factors (conduct problems, emotional problems). When children and their carers or guardians disagree regarding the quality of the caregiving environment, the child's conduct and emotional problems, the quality of the child-carer relationship, and the quality of the child-guardian relationship, they disagree more on the success of the placement. The positive parameters (quality of the caregiving environment: 0.143; relationship scores: 0.239 and 0.269, resp.) indicate that when children are more satisfied with the quality of the caregiving environment compared to carers or guardians, they are also more satisfied with their placement compared to carers and guardians. The negative parameter estimates (conduct problems: −0.211/−0.195 and emotional problems: −0.132) indicate that when children report having more conduct and emotional problems compared to the carers and guardians' perspective on the child's problems, children are more likely to be less positive than

carers and guardians regarding placement success.

3.2. Phase 2

3.2.1. Placement terminations

No significant differences regarding the outcome variable (i.e. *placement success difference score* $_{child\text{-}carer}$ and the *placement success difference score* $_{child\text{-}guardian)}$ were found between the group that did not participate at T1 (n = 11) and the final sample at T1 (n = 28).

Of the 28 children who participated at T1, eight had a different living situation compared to T0. After termination of the foster placement, one child moved to another foster family, three were reunited with their family, two lived in small care facilities (i.e., small living group/small living unit/protected shelter; see Zijlstra et al. [2017] for a detailed description of the small care facilities), and two lived independently.

Positive terminations. Three positive terminations were due to family reunification. In the remaining placements with positive termination (n = 2), reasons for termination were asked. The child who aged out of care was positive about the previous placement. The child had a good life and did not have any problems there, but wanted to be more independent. They also mentioned not wanting to be a burden for the foster family now that they had turned 18 years old. The child who moved to independent living with their spouse had experienced a positive foster placement with no problems. Child, carer and guardian had all agreed on the child's move after careful consideration: the spouse lived in the foster family for a couple of months to see if they could get along. At the moment of data collection, the child was still visiting the foster family's house once a week.

Breakdown. The three remaining placement terminations were marked as placement breakdown (see Fig. 2 for these breakdowns in the Bland-Altman plots). Two had moved to a small care facility, and one moved to another foster family. In the first family, placement termination was due to external factors, namely that the foster family moved to a different country. In the second and third family, placement termination was due to problems in the foster family.

In the second family, child and guardian differed in their explanation for placement termination. The child mentioned preferring to live closer to biological family members who lived near the new foster family. In contrast, the guardian indicated that there were no major problems between child and carers, but that it was "… simply not a good match". According to the guardian, the child and carers followed different religions (which was predominantly a problem for the child), and the child missed their community and culture while living at a foster family from a different country of origin. Since the child was quite young, travelling alone to friends from the same culture seemed to be a problem, which further contributed to the loss of cultural identity. Both the carers at T0 and T1 (different carers) did not want to participate in this study.

In the third family, the child indicated that they had to do household chores, even when they had to do homework for school. The child also stated that the carer did not keep promises, by withholding money promised to the child. The child indicated that they did not want to talk about their time in the foster placement anymore, since "… it was such a bad period".

Placement success difference score and breakdown. Two of the three breakdowns were characterised by high difference scores on the outcome variable 'placement success', as well as on the factors. In contrast, the remaining breakdown case showed a *placement success difference score* of zero, for both child-carer and child-guardian perspectives (see PB* in Fig. 2), indicating that all parties agreed on the success of the foster placement. Interestingly, this breakdown was due to external factors.

The Bland-Altman plot (Fig. 2) shows one more family in which the child seems to be less satisfied with the placement compared to the carer (difference score of −5) and which falls outside the limits of agreement. In contrast to the two previously mentioned placements, this placement did not end in a placement breakdown but also showed high difference scores on the factors.

4. Discussion

This study examined multi-informant discrepancies (between child, carer, and guardian perspectives) regarding placement success of 39 foster placements, as well as possible factors associated with these discrepancies. We also examined whether the discrepancies in placement success at baseline measurement (T0) are related to placement breakdown at second measurement (T1).

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Exenberger, Riedl, Rangaramanujam, Amirtharaj, & Juen, 2019; Hou, Kim, & Benner, 2018; Guion et al., 2009; Moens et al., 2018; Reidler & Swenson, 2012; Sawyer, Baghurst, & Mathias, 1992; Strijker, Van Ooijen, & Knot-Dickscheit, 2011) and as hypothesised, this study found discrepancies in the reports of different informants. In addition, depending on the topic or factor assessed, variation in the level of discrepancy was noted (Hwang & Lee, 2013). For example, the assessment of discrepancies *per placement* in our sample highlighted that child and carer, as well as child and guardian, differ with regard to the assessment of *emotional problems* (in which the child generally reported having more emotional problems than were reported by the carer and guardian about the child), in particular. In contrast, child and carer, as well as child and guardian generally agree (i.e. low or no discrepancy) on the assessment of the *quality of the caregiving environment* and the child's *conduct problems*. Other studies (e.g., Janssens & Deboutte, 2009; Kramer et al., 2004; Lau et al., 2004) have also emphasised that agreement between informants was higher for externalising problems (i.e. conduct problems) than for internalising problems (i.e. emotional problems), probably because externalising problems are more visible (Bean, Derluyn, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Broekaert, & Spinhoven, 2007; Van der Ende, Verhulst, & Tiemeier, 2012) and are thus more often discussed with all those concerned when guardians visited the foster home. However, our results regarding the *quality of the caregiving environment* seem to contradict previous findings (Taber, 2010; Tein, Roosa, & Michaels, 1994). A possible explanation for the high agreement may be that the method of supervision by the guardianship organisation (Schippers, 2017, pp. 105-116) and the questionnaire assessing the quality of the caregiving environment (BIC Questionnaire; Kalverboer & Zijlstra, 2006; Zijlstra, 2012) both address similar theoretical concepts, though it was unclear whether something similar holds true for previous studies. In addition, children and carers largely agreed about the *quality of the child-carer relationship,* whereas most children and guardians disagreed about the *quality of the child-guardian relationship*; children generally rated the relationship as more positive. A possible explanation for the differing views between child and guardian regarding their relationship is that guardians see themselves as good professionals when keeping a professional distance and not allowing themselves to form close relationships with the unaccompanied refugee child, whereas children were looking for an emotional commitment from guardians "… in a care system that is based on professional and interchangeable care relationships" (De Graeve & Bex, 2017, p. 86).

Variation in the level of discrepancy might not only be noticed with regard to the factors assessed: previous studies (Hwang & Lee, 2013; Van der Ende et al., 2012) have indicated that discrepancies might also be derived from the type of informant pairs. For example, a carer sees the child on a day-to-day basis, while the guardian meets the child once every two to three weeks, on average (Kalverboer et al., 2016). This might result in more agreement in the reports of children and carers compared to children and guardians, as the carer interacts with the child more frequently. However, children in our sample generally reported more *social-emotional problems* than carers and guardians did about the child (as also found in Rip et al., 2020b), whereby children and guardians differed *less* in their assessment of the child's social emotional problems. Walsh and Walsh (1990, as cited from Oosterman, Schuengel, Slot, Bullens, & Doreleijers, 2007) emphasised the professionalism of

guardians in the assessment of the child's behaviour; sometimes, an outsiders' view (i.e. guardian) may be more accurate than that of people 'within' the foster placement (i.e. carer). Nevertheless, even though other studies have also emphasised that children often reported more problems than other informants (e.g., Guion et al., 2009; Lau et al., 2004; Van der Ende et al., 2012), it is worrying that carers and guardians do not seem to 'recognise' the *social-emotional problems* experienced by the child.

Discrepancies might also differ based on their method of assessment (Reidler & Swenson, 2012). In our study, we looked at discrepancies in various ways. By calculating the mean and standard deviation of the difference scores for the child-carer dyad and child-guardian dyad, the magnitude (i.e. how much do carer and child differ), as well as the direction (i.e. who in the dyad is more positive) of the discrepancy, could be interpreted (Reidler & Swenson, 2012). However, this method failed to give insight into placement-level data. Therefore, we calculated the number and percentages of placements in which children and carers, and children and guardians, agreed on a specific factor to some extent; this method was less sensitive to outliers. Combining these descriptive methods allowed us to look at data in a complementary way, but it also showed contrasting results. For example, the *quality of the caregiving environment* difference score showed more discrepancy between child and carer compared to the child and guardian data, whereas the discrepancy percentages per dyad highlighted a conflicting pattern: less discrepancy between child and carer compared to the child and guardian data. Combining the outcomes of both methods showed that in most placements, child and carer agree on the quality of the caregiving environment to some extent, but that on average, children are more negative than their carers about the placement, with at least one child being very negative about the quality of the caregiving environment (see range of −27;7).

As "…informant discrepancies predict poor outcomes in ways that cannot be accounted for by the individual reports used to assess these discrepancies" (De Los Reyes, 2011, p. 4), the outcomes with regard to *placement success* seem promising, as in more than half of the placements, there was low or no discrepancy (i.e. high agreement) between child and carer, as well as between child and guardian. Agreement between child and carer was predominantly high. Furthermore, the Bland Altman plots revealed an interesting, though not surprising, pattern: when placements are rated with a high average *placement success* score (looking at child-carer and child-guardian dyads), child and carer, as well as child and guardian generally agree on the success of the foster placement. In contrast, placements with a low average placement success score show large discrepancies between the perspectives, which may also lead to breakdown. Remarkably, in all placements with a low average placement success score, the child is most negative about placement success. Davis et al. (2007) explained that children have a different response style than their carers: children are likely to provide extreme scores and base their response on one single example, more than carers. Yet, our results highlight that the extreme negative scores reported by children, in cases where carers are more positive, predominantly indicate that something is not going well; as such, simply classifying an extreme score as 'a response style' does not help identify placement breakdowns in advance. In addition, a 'low placement success average score' may better reveal that a family requires help compared to a 'high placement success difference score', as, in the case of a low placement success average score, at least one of the perspectives is rather negative. However, placement success difference scores can help understand who is less satisfied with the placement, and could also inform the guardianship organisation's guidance practices.

Due to the limited number of breakdown cases, it is difficult to describe associations between discrepancies in placement success and breakdown. Moreover, as Oosterman et al. (2007) concluded that several (rather than some) factors were found to be associated with placement breakdown, it could well be that the association described below is actually between discrepancies in other factors, such as the quality of the caregiving environment, and placement breakdown. That being said, it is remarkable that two of the three breakdowns were characterised by high difference scores on the outcome variable 'placement success', as well as on the factors. This could mean that if children and carers disagree regarding one factor, they are more likely to disagree regarding other factors as well, as also concluded by Guion et al. (2009). The remaining breakdown case, which showed no discrepancy regarding placement success, was due to external factors, meaning that the placement did not end as a consequence of negative experiences in the foster placement. One placement showed a large discrepancy between child and carer (difference score of −5), which fell outside the limits of agreement, but that case did not end in a placement breakdown. An explanation for this might be that the child, who lived with a sibling, preferred to live with that sibling over experiencing a breakdown with the possibility of being separated from the sibling. Minty (1999) found that sometimes placements offer inadequate care for children, but do not break down.

Another goal of this study was to explore the factors associated with placement success discrepancies. Results of the multilevel analyses showed that discrepancies regarding placement success were mainly associated with differences in perspectives regarding fostering factors (quality of the caregiving environment, child-carer relationship, child-guardian relationship) and child factors (conduct problems, emotional problems). The observed association between discrepancy regarding the *quality of the caregiving environment* and discrepancy regarding *placement success* might be explained from a family system approach, in which "… congruent perceptions of the family between parents and adolescents are vital […] for adaptive family functioning" (Sher-Censor, Parke, & Coltrane, 2011, as cited in Stuart & Jose, 2012, p. 859), and thus for congruent perceptions of placement success (i.e. no discrepancy). Similarly, Reiss et al. (1983, as cited from Stuart & Jose, 2012) found an association between discrepancies and lower levels of family cohesion. An interpretation of the association between discrepancies regarding relationships (i.e. child-carer; child-guardian) and discrepancies regarding placement success might be provided by Pelton and Forehand (2001). They highlight that the discrepancies in how children and carers perceive their relationship might lead to conflict (p. 2), which may contribute to greater disagreement, possibly also with regard to placement success. A similar pattern might apply with regard to the child-guardian relationship. A possible explanation for the association between discrepancy in the child's social-emotional well-being — more specifically *conduct* and *emotional problems* — and discrepancy regarding placement success is that disagreement between children and carers or guardians on the level of problems experienced by the child, may cause the child to feel that their problems are not noticed by carers or guardians, reducing their satisfaction with the placement and leading to more discrepancy regarding placement success.

4.1. Strengths and limitations

This study has several limitations. One of the main methodological limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size and, in turn, the low numbers of breakdowns observed. As such, conclusions regarding the relationship between differences in perspectives with regard to placement success and breakdown are only descriptive in nature. In addition, carers did not participate in one of the breakdown cases, meaning that there is no insight into the reason for termination from the carers' perspective in this case. Future studies could benefit from a longer inclusion period or expansion abroad to allow as many participants as possible.

Furthermore, the benchmark between 'low' and 'high' discrepancy is debatable. Though the benchmark is similar for all variables (at 10% of the total range, see data analysis), it is debatable. Other factors, such as the length of the relationship, may also have influenced the levels of agreement between child and carer, as well as child and guardian (Hwang & Lee, 2013).

Another limitation is the judgement of the placement termination. Placements terminated as a consequence of family reunification were automatically regarded as 'positive termination'. However, in some situations, living with biological family might not offer the most desirable outcome for the child, e.g., because the child has not lived with their biological parents for a long time and family roles could have changed accordingly (Derluyn & Ang, 2020). Nevertheless, in most situations, reunification with parents is seen as the preferred option (Evans et al., 2018; Steinbock, 1996) and is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) article 9 (separation from parents) and article 18 (parental responsibilities and state assistance), and the Guidelines on Alternative Care for Children (United Nations General Assembly, 2009).

Another limitation of this study is the fact that our multilevel analysis did not take into account that some guardians (n = 8) filled out the questionnaire for more than one foster placement, suggesting additional dependencies between placements.

This is the first study to look at discrepancies between unaccompanied refugee children and their carers and guardians in a foster family, with regard to placement success and factors such as the quality of the caregiving environment, the child's social-emotional well-being, and relationships. Measuring the perspectives of children, carers and guardians with regard to both predictor and outcome variables is essential for a full understanding of its associations (Reidler & Swenson, 2012). Therefore, the perspectives of unaccompanied refugee children, foster carers and guardians were included in a multilevel analysis, which took into account the nested structure of the data.

A second strength is the design of this study. By collecting data for two consecutive years, we have gained insight into breakdowns and the extent to which they are associated with discrepancies regarding perceived placement success. Moreover, asking *all* parties, including former carers and guardians, about the reason for placement termination leads to better insights into those discrepancies.

A third strength of this study is the use of identical instruments across the different perspectives (i.e. child, carer and guardian), which increased the validity of multi-informant assessments.

4.2. Implications for research, policy and practice

Follow-up research should focus on the course of the foster placement, by looking more in-depth into the outcomes of the second measurement (T1) to determine who is and is not doing well at T1, and why. The data from the third measurement are currently being collected, and we will report on the course of the foster placement in a future study.

Future research might also focus on 'the other family members' in the foster family. In our study, we asked both carers to participate, but — because there were only three cases in which both carers participated— we only used the data of one of the foster carers. The other family members, such as other foster children and biological children of foster carers, were not asked to participate, although they may influence the experience in the foster family (Sinclair et al., 2005; Ni Raghallaigh, 2013; Wade, 2019). However, we asked the child about their relationship with *each* family member living in the foster placement; results (not reported) indicate that the quality of these relationships could vary greatly. A more qualitative assessment of the relationships within a foster family, or the inclusion of other family members in a quantitative approach, might reveal different patterns. For the guardianship organisation, the differing outcomes on the quality of the relationship in one placement might also help to start a discussion. The relationship between child and carer seems of importance in previous studies (Rip et al., 2020a,b), but it can imply that other relationships are also important.

Insight into discrepancies between child, foster carer and guardian can inform guidance practices. For example, the results of this study show that a difference in the assessment of the quality of the caregiving environment can lead to differences in the assessment of placement success. Large differences in the assessment of placement success are not desirable, so steering and monitoring of the quality of the caregiving environment may provide a solution, especially because "… careful matching (except in the case of long-stay placements) is almost always impossible" (Sinclair et al., 2005, p. 143).

4.3. Conclusion

Results showed that discrepancies regarding placement success were mainly associated with differences in perspectives regarding fostering factors (quality of the caregiving environment, child-carer relationship, child-guardian relationship) and child factors (conduct problems, emotional problems). Children, carers and guardians each provide a unique perspective on factors related to the foster placement. Consulting all of these perspectives might be helpful for guardians in shaping their guidance practices, as differing perspectives can provide information on problematic family functioning (Moens et al., 2018). More specifically, for guardianship organisations, looking at the combination of large discrepancies in perceived placement success and a low average placement success score may help identify placements at risk of breaking down later on.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Jet Rip: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Formal analysis, Investigation, Project administration. **Selsela Hasami:** Writing - review & editing, Formal analysis, Investigation, Project administration. **Wendy Post:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Formal analysis, Supervision, Funding acquisition. **Elianne Zijlstra:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition. **Erik J. Knorth:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Supervision. **Margrite Kalverboer:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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