

The Experiential Orientation, a Good Practice Model in the Assessment and Professional Training of Foster Parents in Romania

Marinela-Carmen Grigore^{*iii}

*** Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Work Department, „Ovidius” University, Constanța, Romania**

Abstract

Introduction: *In this study, part of a more extensive research, we want to show an example of continuous assessment and professional training of foster parents, extremely necessary in the foster care practice in Romania. Thus we bring to the foreground the need for holistic assessments which include social, legal, medical and psychological dimensions. When we talk about the psychological aspects we are considering the need for a more in depth assessment which includes both personality traits and aspects related to psychological traumas and transgenerational history, which impact the personality of foster parents. Also, the need for a professional training as a mean of psycho-emotional support and behavioral optimization of foster parents is another significant element that gives value to our research. Through techniques belonging to the experiential psychotherapy, we managed to structure more in depth the assessment and professional training of specialists in foster care.*

Objectives: *The overall objective of this research was to develop a psychodiagnostic and training methodology of the professional conduct of professional foster parents. Specific objectives were: 1. To identify the psycho-behavioral profile of the efficient foster parent, profile which followed three aspects: personality, the family history of psychological traumas and professional competence; 2. To develop and validate a complex assessment gride of the foster parents' professional effectiveness, by the multidisciplinary team psychologist - social worker; 3. Experimentation and validation of a psycho-behavioral model centered on the optimization of the foster parents – a formative intervention.*

Methods: *The research methods and tools used were selected in accordance with the study's objectives and research hypotheses. Wanting to create a holistic assessment and personal optimization program of foster parents, we used psychodiagnostic methods, as well as a system of forms and tools to evaluate the professional behavior of foster parents and the experimental method*

ⁱⁱⁱ Corresponding author: Marinela-Carmen Grigore, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, “Ovidius” University, Mamaia Boulevard 124, 900527, Constanța, Romania, Tel: 0723069987. E-mail: marinelagrigore@yahoo.com.

which consisted of applying the experiential group intervention model, centered on the personal development of foster parents.

Results: *The research results led to confirmation of hypotheses, thus achieving the overall goal to create a unified assessment methodology and training in Romania for the foster care system.*

Conclusions: *Considering the need for quality in the evaluation and training process of foster care, the research methodology took into account the objectives that led to the development of an efficient professional behavior of foster parents and the methodological approach was structured on two dimensions: evaluative and formative. The foster parents' psycho-behavioral profile assessed on a triaxial model (personality factors axis; professional skills axis and family history of psychological trauma axis) and the experiential group program focused on the personal development of foster parents can be considered by practitioners as evaluative and formative landmarks.*

Keywords: *foster parent, holistic assessment, professional training, psycho-emotional support, professional behavioral optimization*

I. Introduction

In the assessment of foster parents, it was revealed that there are different procedures, different diagnostic tools and that the evaluation is done at the discretion of the experience and ability of the psychologist who works on the case and not of the county institution responsible for child protection. Thus, there is a need for implementing a specific structure and stringency in evaluating the future foster parents. Looking at all the rules and standards on child protection from the foster parents, in terms of its evaluation, there are the following shortcomings, namely:

- There isn't clearly stipulated the compulsoriness of psychological evaluation;
- There isn't a standardized framework of methods, techniques and evaluation tools;
- There isn't a clear, uniform procedure throughout the country, regarding the initial and continuing evaluation of foster care and the family.

Thereby we take into consideration the need of a holistic evaluation which includes social, juridical, medical and psychologic elements. When we talk about psychologic elements, we consider that a deeper approach is crucial; this has to evaluate personality traits, but also aspects related to personal and transgenerational history that will influence the personality of the future foster parent.

Also, the need of continuous training as a mean of psychological emotional support and as an optimization of the foster parents' behavior is an element which adds value to our research. Under the law, there is a syllabus that includes categories of information that a future foster parent must have. The occupational standard of the profession shows that the foster parent must have knowledge and skills for raising and educating a child and that is why the foster parent needs continuous training.

This profession is special because the foster parents do not leave their work duties at 4 p.m. to the front door of the house and in addition, they are working with souls, emotions, and profound feelings of abandonment and separation. Foster parents are the ones who "foment wounds" of children who experience traumas hard to understand for many of us and that is why the training they most need is the psycho-emotional support.

Also, although the professional activity takes place within a family, in that environment the foster parent shave multiple roles, besides the professional one: partner, parent of their own children and above all, they consider themselves the parents of the child in foster.

On the one hand it requires that these children feel integrated in the family, but to feel that they belong, they need natural, loving behaviors that the foster parents would have with their own children as a mother or father. Naturally, for emotional balance, these children care for those who care for them and the foster parent does the same, despite theoretical training which requires certain reserved behavior considering the temporary character of the measure.

Practice shows us that there are children in foster care for many years for whom it cannot be found a definitive measure to reach the age of majority or graduation. There are many cases in which the foster parents were not ready to go through all periods of child development and to face future challenges of a child growing up, with natural questions: what will it happen to me, how long will I remain in the family, where will I go next?

The foster parents, who are an intermediate between DGASPC (The General Direction of Social Assistance and Child Protection) and the child, are assigned indispensable skills and knowledge, worthy for a professional: knowledge of the stages of human development/child development; knowledge of the elements of care, safety and protection, education and child rearing; knowledge of children's rights; network of support institutions; regulations on child protection etc. All these and even more are needed to complete the training and become a foster parent.

From the practice of foster care, the dynamics of child placement in the family, issues and socio-economic context, we have identified certain needs that the foster parent has and that we have not found in any document that establishes the profession and in any stage of the intervention, neither in the assessment nor in the training.

Thus, based on the occupational standard that clearly states the foster parent's right of training, we intend to bring to light the missing piece of this vast puzzle of foster care and *focus on the psycho-emotional needs of foster parents* as an essential component of initial and continuous training.

Considering that there must be a balance between professional responsibilities and professional rights or needs of a foster parent to exercise this profession, we have identified three essential elements for assessing and optimizing the professional conduct:

1. The development of skills of self-knowledge on the correct understanding and assuming of the roles in the family, coupled with the rigors of professional status.
2. Awareness of the need for personal development.

3. Understanding personal and family history with its psycho-traumatic elements.

Personal and familial psycho-traumatic history was identified as an essential diagnostic element and as a motivation for continuous training and personal optimization for reaching an optimal emotional balance and integration of the children in the foster family.

In my opinion, one of the most important skills of a foster parent is to know oneself as a person. Although all the knowledge assimilated according to the standard employment and training programs are necessary, they are not sufficient in a profession that involves a real human contact. Change must come from within to stimulate change on others. The foster parent can promote the growth or development of the child without managing to do the same thing with himself.

"If we do not know our real nature and if we are not attentive to our needs and our resources, if we don't express our own being, including our blind zones, unknown or hidden, I'm inclined to consider theoretical knowledge, as broad and method expertise, as sophisticated as it can be, as useful as a conscious massage of a wooden leg of a patient " (Nuță, 2011, p. 42).

It is true that the foster parent is part of a multidisciplinary team, with well-defined practices, but if their behavioral patterns and "inner world" are distorted, they cannot fully support a child who needs authenticity and stability.

Therefore, in the continuous training process of foster parents, personal optimization is an indispensable competence. *"Working with yourself and with others in an experiential group, is I think, the best way to clarify and empower inner unification, to becoming not only a professional, but a unique person"* (Nuță, 2011, p. 42).

Thus, the foster parent must go through a process of personal analysis, to be able to "grow" together with his partner, his children and child or children in foster care. The foster parent has in turn, in the continuous training process, the need of self-expression, of self-analysis and understanding oneself and others. The optimization of professional behavior is nothing but the development of what he/she is, by exercising his/her roles (woman or man, couple partner, parent) and merging it into a harmonious and efficient way with the professional rigors.

Through experiential psychotherapy methods we will be able to bring more structure and depth to the assessment and continuous professional training of specialists in foster care.

Experiential psychotherapy, through its

positive values underlying understanding, exploring and assisting human beings, is a paradigm of restructuring and development of the person. The experiential psychotherapy represents a way to regain and preserve the somatic, psychologic and social health, which takes place as the person develops, releases and uses in a creative way the inner resources, being able to face stress and other existential challenges through a conscious evolution process, based on making free choices and assuming responsibilities.

Individual health cannot be split by social health and the natural environment. The basic principle is the **experience here and now**, which allows the subject awareness of their perceptions, emotions, thoughts and feelings. Gaining consciousness of the self, the person will be able to reconcile with his internal and external world meanings and refine through self-restructuring (Enache, 2013).

In light of this psychotherapeutic orientation, living in the present moment is the fundamental condition for the personal development, training and spiritual growth of the individual. So the focus is on present experience, neither the past nor of the future, enabling the person to be aware of her own perceptions, thoughts, emotions and feelings and to assume them consciously, to be able to transform them, to have control over them and over one's life and choices.

In training, education and intervention cases centered on personal optimization, the experiential method focuses on the transformation of self and interpersonal relationships. It prevents alienation which may result from removal of self and becomes a way of keeping the somatic, psychologic and social health balance in simultaneously harmonizing with oneself, others and the world.

When the experiential methods are applied to family issues and not to individuals assembled by chance in a family group, the purpose of individual raising merges with the aim of achieving a strong cohesion (Enache, 2013).

To understand the changes brought by the practice of principles and methods of the experiential psychotherapy in the assessment and personal optimization process of foster parents, it is important to bring to the fore the theoretical landmarks, conceptual and methodologic, specific to the transgenerational approach, and also the characteristics of the experiential optimization group whose personal optimization methods (provocative, creative and restructuring) were the experimental method used in our research group focused on **experiential personal development of foster professionals**.

The focus on the dynamics of family relationships in the training and personal development process

On one hand, analyzing the need for continuous training of foster parents, we have identified both in legislation and in the professional practice, a lack of programs that focus on optimizing behavior and take into the center of attention the foster parent as a unique being with needs, desires, values and beliefs, roles and responsibilities.

On the other hand, we understand that the environment in which a child without parental care is placed, is the family environment, be it the extended family, relatives, friends, neighbors, or a foster parent. The child gets to be raised within a family.

If a foster family includes other members such as a couple partner with the couple's natural child or children, the arrival of a new member in the family affects each one of them. Family dynamics change and understanding this change is important, as it is to have patience and flexibility to help the new member adjust and integrate. The foster parent will make an extra effort and his attention will divide for one more member. The adjustment of a foster parent to multiple roles is required to keep a functional balance in the family. The couple partner also has a major role in this parental process, because according to his availability, his opening and support, the family will succeed in a way as natural as possible to manage changes and to adjust to the multiple dynamic roles.

While on a conscious level family members are very open to receive a new member, showing plenty of generosity and warmth in the initial evaluation, upon receiving one or more children in the family, the changes can cause major stress, which will be felt by everyone involved.

If the initial assessment includes the entire family, it would be ideal if the entire family would attend the personal development training. Although the legislation does not provide for this, not even for foster parents, we believe that thematic training courses still need to include methods and techniques for identifying personal resources and support for the foster parent to successfully adapt to different roles exerted constantly both as a woman, wife, mother, and as a professional and a parent of substitute (foster parent).

The experiential group focused on personal development of foster parents

The experiential group answers the members' needs to better understand themselves and to experiment new interaction methods, more sincere and authentic. "The group acts as a "cultural island" where

social gaming rules are temporarily suspended, stereotypes and conventional values are identified and people overcome the inauthentic impersonal attitudes" (Nuță, 2011, p. 50).

For the foster parent, the experiential group can be an area of improvement and can increase interpersonal skills and relational efficiency. "Improving self-image, softening rigid perceptions of themselves and/or others, emotional restructuring, cognitive restructuring, are just some of the directions usable in the resource of the group". (Nuță, 2011, p. 51).

The experiential optimization group focuses on the personal development of each participant giving them the opportunity to gain better knowledge of themselves, to discover their personal resources and to meet with the others. Group members communicate spontaneously in this way:

- discovering a sense of belonging to the group (cohesion);
- learning from the successes and mistakes of others (interpersonal learning);
- discovering that others can have similar difficulties (universality);
- regaining hope that they are valued by others and by their desire to provide help (altruism);
- learning from other participants' reactions to their own social behavior (imitation, empathy, modeling);
- expressing strong emotions, liberating (catharsis);
- adopting attitudes of trust and mutual support (Bloch, Crouch, 1985, cit. in Mitrofan, I., Ene, A., 2005, p.35).

The experiential group satisfies the need to belong, involving people in a micro-society where they have the opportunity to confirm themselves through others. Group members communicate effectively and self-disclosure, each one understanding that he/she isn't the only one facing that issue. Group members are faithful mirrors and their authentic reactions are mental hygiene factors.

For the foster parents, the experiential group can be a perimeter of self-affirmation and inter-training, a "growing together" experience. Each person in the group is due to self-discovery and is supported in his confrontation with the challenging situation. The members of the group become aware of themselves and they are developing their capacity of self-observation and self-exploration, of assessment and re-assessment, which enables them to offer comprehensive support and empathy in their interpersonal relationships.

The experiential personal development group training facilitates (Mitrofan, 2007, p. 18, 19):

- flexible, adaptive interpersonal dynamics;
- the decrease and self-control of the aggression, hostility, intolerance to frustration, mental rigidity and various forms of discrimination;
- optimization of the self-image by increasing self-confidence and auto-acceptance
- psycho-emotional ripening.

This type of training has many positive effects, namely (Mitrofan, 2007, p. 18, 19):

- developing emotional intelligence and empathy;
- development of social and relational intelligence;
- developing cultural intelligence;
- spiritual growth, development of interfaith and religious tolerance;
- development of consciousness, responsibility, environmental attitudes and behavior.

The experiential optimization and personal development provides its members in a genuine way the opportunity to live here and now, to experience the meeting with each other and with one's own image in the eyes of others. Thus, each becomes the other, a window that provides another perspective on reality, a privileged space in which any member of the group can meet with oneself (Mitrofan & Badea, 1999).

Each group constitution depends on the responsible involvement of each participant and the extent to which they acknowledge that other members of the group have similar problems. Gradually, the atmosphere expands, the privacy of the group increases, self-disclosure appears and also a constructive confrontation of different views and first initiatives of emotional support. Various positive emotions and a sense of unity with others increase curiosity and willingness to be involved in new experiences. In this way, the participants adopt and experiment new attitudes and behaviors without any fears.

Thus, in its own pace, each member of the group:

- becomes his own creator
- learns to relate and communicate with others;
- realizes that in order to develop as a person, it is important to get, but also to provide support, which determines the consciousness of self-worth, boosting self-esteem, self-acceptance and confidence in themselves and others.

The interaction dynamic between group members leads to lower resistance and defenses, assimilation and redefinition of traumatic experiences as a means of extending the individual experience. Experiential group members acquire experience through working by themselves to themselves, engaging in a growth experience together with others and discovering the warmth, closeness and mutual trust. The experiential group multiplies and deepens people's knowledge about themselves and assists them in making the changes that they want. (Nuță, 2011).

The focus here and now on one's own emotional experiences, the willingness to provide support and to impersonate another member of the group to enter in a dialogue drives the availability of each participant to engage in a process of self-creation. Self-creation starts "by demolishing unilateral viewpoints by giving up stereotypes of thinking and behavior, by dissolving the negative aspects of self-image" (Mitrofan & Badea, 1999).

Inside the group, the assertiveness and personal value are stimulated, confirmed and recognized as personal capacities and resources. The members assume responsibility for their action, gain control over their projections instead of blaming others and experience their own power and self-support capacity in handling their environment. They expand their body and emotional self-awareness, learn to fulfill their needs and to acquire skills that allow them to satisfy needs without disturbing others (Nuță, 2011).

According to Iolanda Mitrofan (2004), the personal optimization group is "symbolically invested by the participants with the quality of a primary-womb collective social matrix. It serves as an alchemist who facilitates, creates and confirms or validates the restructuring and psychological transformation of participants in an experiential unifying therapeutic process. This process engenders realistic foundations of a re-individuation of a creative and spiritual growth of each participant" (p. 85-86).

At the same time, talking about mechanisms of change within the personal development group, its members have the possibility to engage in healthy interpersonal relationships, treating others analogous to the way they relate to themselves. "Foreign exchanges are usually the mirror of the internal reality of the person." (Mitrofan & Godeanu 2011, p. 181).

According to Rutan and Stone (2011) there are three mechanisms of change in group therapy:

1. Imitation. In the group, learning is imitation. Participants noted many networking interactions styles and problem solving techniques.

They discovered similar situations faced others and learnt by imitation other behavioral and attitudinal strategies for solving problems.

2. Identification. The identification mechanism can be defined as an unconscious process by which individuals come into contact with each other, imitating people they like and they want to sow. Consciously, this determination can be regarded as a sense of attraction, belonging or attachment to the group. It creates group cohesion so that any issue raised by a person can resonate in other members, identifying similar life situations.

3. Internalization. Internalizing rules and behaviors is a signal to change, activating flexibility in managing the participants' condition both inside and interpersonal. "By identifying, clarifying and interpreting, the individuals integrate and transform knowledge acquired in their resources and beliefs" (op.cit., 2011, p. 182).

And to realize fully how important it is for a foster parent the participate in such a group, we will report initially a model of a fully functional family where there is harmony, and everything goes smooth, natural, relaxed, everyone knows their roles and everyone feels rewarded and valued for what they are.

But it happens too many times to see how this balance of a family's matrix is destabilized because of the many stressful life situations in which the family cannot find the resources to adapt. It happens that distrust, concerns, and unmet needs surface, the rules imposed by social and professional responsibilities are exaggerated and unpredictable situations appear, that block the family members, who don't know what to do or how to react.

All this leads to inappropriate behavior within the frameworks of the family, aggression, strife, frustration etc., and in these circumstances the family enters a vicious circle from which it can hardly get out. Thus, the harmony is replaced by authority, the need to impose and dominate, inauthentic communication and repressed feelings.

This situation can be met in any family, even in the foster family, things can be done mechanically, automatically, without spontaneity or authenticity. Above all, the caregiver has an additional responsibility, which is to be professional, to grow and care for the child or children coming over to the existing family system, as required by law. If the family does not find place in the family circle to seamlessly integrate these children, functionality is disturbed, based on the repression of needs from other family members, which will lead to the same impasse.

The structure of the experiential group program focused on personal development of foster parents

Depending on the results of psychodiagnostic assessments conducted, we created the model structure considering the formative aspects of ego maturation, optimizing personal awareness and integrating gender roles, parenting, understanding and integration trauma etc.

If the selection of a person to become a foster parent, the competence of care, protection, education and socialization of the child are essential evaluative criteria, the experiential group focuses on other important factors such as involving family dynamics, communication and relationships in couple and family patterns, parenting skills, adaptation to stress, crisis, self-knowledge and personal analysis, understanding of sex-role models etc.

The program structure is a creative one, original, with methods and techniques specific to the unifying experiential method that we have adapted to the beneficiaries of this research.

Below can be seen the twelve-session structured program. Each session had set goals that led to certain expected results using the experiential psychotherapy group techniques. Thus, we began from the knowledge and inter-knowledge of participants, participants' awareness of themselves, who they are, what resources they have, what are their needs and desires; the conscious integration of gender roles: female / male, maternal / paternal; the 3rd meeting was centered on a deeper self-knowledge, self-awareness and connection to the elements, connection with their own feelings.

The experiences correlated with the elements and empathic capacity development. In another meeting we wanted to understand the symbolic meaning of root identity by creating a creative space in the transgenerational identity: understanding repetitive life scenarios and unconscious connections with the predecessors. In another meeting I wanted to capture the dynamics of family roles, awareness of the couple and family relationships, ownership and integration of sex-role identity. Awareness of emotions and their expression patterns in different situations was another objective.

Another meeting aimed at learning authentic, open and assertive communication skills. From interpersonal communication we wanted to go to intrapersonal communication through body awareness, relaxation, communication with own body; focusing on relaxation and inner focus on identifying new resources in their inner world. The last meeting was conducted

just gloating in the "here and now" of each stage of the program and acknowledging the effects of the changes that were made.

The structure of the formative group sessions, each session's objectives, techniques and the outcomes expected are summarized in the following table.

Table no. 1 – The structure of the experiential group program

No. of sessions	Objectives	Outcomes	Techniques
1	Presentation, knowing each other and self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowing of participants - Awareness of own expectations - Self-disclosure through metaphorical scenarios and self-awareness in the present moment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialogue techniques (C. Rogers) - Metaphorical scenarios
2	Deepening self-knowledge; Understanding the motivation to become a foster parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A better understanding and group cohesion - Practicing empathy - Self-disclosure through metaphorical scenarios and self-awareness in the present moment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialogue techniques (C. Rogers) - Metaphorical scenarios - Drawing
3	Awareness of gender roles: female / male, maternal / paternal and maladaptive patterns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness and identification of psycho-sexual patterns - Identification of behavioral patterns (male and female) - Identification of behavior patterns (maternal and paternal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Metaphorical scenarios - Role play - Analysis of polarities and identity
4	Connecting to the elements, deepen self-knowledge, self-awareness, connect with their feelings, experiences related to the elements; Empathic capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness of creative potential and self-development. - Identification and stimulation of the empathic capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Metaphorical scenarios - Role play
5	Understanding the symbolic meaning, root identity; Creating in a spontaneous way the transgenerational identity space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitating contact with the elements, - Accessing the family and transgenerational shadow - Understanding life lessons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Genogram - Metaphorical scenarios
6	Understanding repetitive life scenarios and unconscious connections with ancestors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gathering information related to personal history - Identification of commonalities in the intergenerational and transgenerational plan focusing on psycho-traumatic events and understanding the significance of the maternal role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Genogram - Dialogue techniques (C. Rogers)
7	Learning genuine, open and assertive communication. Awareness of networking in couple and family.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness of the importance of nonverbal communication - Acquiring communication of type I, non-violent, compassionate - Learning by practicing active listening communication - Discovering and understanding the types of relationships that exist between them - Optimization of family relationships and communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialogue techniques (C. Rogers) - Working with body - Family sculpture - Role Play

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exercising the ability to express feelings towards family members - Awareness of all the relations between the couple and the family Identifying patterns of constructive relationships 	
8	Awareness of emotions and their expression. Awareness of personal emotional expression patterns in different situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding the effects of emotions on behavior and communication in relation to others. - Understanding the methods of expressing their emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creative expressive techniques through drawing and modeling
9	Experimenting with music, and dance and pantomime psychological characteristics and functional expression of the fundamental elements (air, fire, water, earth) (Mitrofan, 2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Releasing the body, exercising expressiveness and creativity through networking with others. - Symbolic experimentation with body, emotional and mental state of being. - Self connection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Metaphorical scenario - Working with body - Dialogue techniques
10	Body awareness, relaxation, communication with one's body, awareness of inner personal resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practicing connection to their bodily sensations - Awareness of their body and the capacity to reconnect to their own body - The ability to practice relaxation, recreation - Awareness of the creative potential and self-development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Metaphorical scenarios - Dialogue techniques - Relaxation techniques
11	Relaxation and inner focus, focus on identifying new resources, development of imagination etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inducing a state of relaxation with inner focus - Discovery of new sensations, personal resources, new solutions to their own problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Metaphorical scenarios - Dialogue techniques - Relaxation techniques
12	Revisiting the present moment of each milestone of the program; Awareness of the effects and changes achieved; Final assessment and conclusion of the program in a positive manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotional expression - Awareness of the positive effects of the experiential group - Self-assessment and evaluation schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialogue techniques - Techniques for self-assessment and assessment of the benefits obtained.

II. Methods

Research objectives

General objective: To develop a methodology for a psychodiagnostic evaluation and training for perfecting foster parents' behavior.

Specific objectives

1. Identification of psycho-behavioral profile of the efficient foster parent, structured in 3 areas:

- a) Personality structure
- b) Psycho – traumatic history of the family
- c) Professional competence

2. Development and statistical validation of a complex evaluation grid of foster parents' professional conduct efficiency, by the multidisciplinary team psychologist - social worker.

3. Testing and validating an optimization model of the foster parents' behavior - formative intervention.

Assumptions of research

General hypothesis:

We suppose that an efficient professional conduct of the foster parents is determined by two dimensions: evaluative and formative, represented by the psycho-behavioral profile of foster parents and by the experiential group model centered on the personal development of the professional foster parent.

Specific assumptions:

I.1. We suppose that the psycho-behavioral profile of foster parents, evaluated on a triaxle model (Axis of personality factors, psycho-traumatic family history axis and the professional skills axis) may lead to foster parent professional conduct's efficiency.

I.2. We suppose that foster parents' participation in the experiential personal development program, will lead to improved personality factors,

with significant differences between the results obtained before starting the program and after its completion, but also between the experimental group and the control group.

I.3. We suppose that foster parents' participation in the experiential personal development program, will lead to improved professional behavior, with significant differences between the results obtained before starting the program and after its completion and also between the experimental group and the control group.

The research group

The research group consists of a total of 300 foster parents involved differently in the three stages of the research.

- 300 foster parents in six counties: Constanta, Tulcea, Ialomita, Buzau, Galati and Botosani participated in an evaluation process of psycho-traumatic family history.

- 60 of these, foster parents in Constanta County, participated in all stages of the research: psychodiagnosis assessment, formative intervention and post intervention assessment.

In the formative intervention group, the research group was divided into experimental group and the control group. The program focusing on the personal development of the foster parents, was followed by 30 foster parents. Finally all 60 foster parents were evaluated post intervention.

The research methods and tools used were selected in accordance with the objectives and research hypotheses.

1. Psychodiagnostic Method: the NEOPIR Personality Test

2. The system of sheets and tools to evaluate the professional conduct of foster parents

Grid of extensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the foster parents' professional conduct

3. Experimental method. It was developed on an experimental group consisting of 30 foster parents and a control group of similar number, by applying the experiential intervention group model, centered on the personal development of the foster parents.

4. Statistical methods. Depending on the objectives and research hypotheses, data processing was performed with SPSS statistical version 20 and

Excel using the following statistical methods: correlational analysis; Levente test and t-test to verify significant differences.

III. Results

The research results are grouped into two stages: assessment stage and experimental stage. The two stages are interrelated so that the outcomes obtained lead to developing an evaluation psychodiagnostic methodology and training of professional conduct of foster parents.

Statistical interpretation of no. 1 hypothesis' results

For identifying the efficient - psycho-behavioral profile of the foster parent, we have divided it into three dimensions: the structure of personality, psycho-traumatic family history and professional competence in accordance with Objective 1. The results of the evaluation stage were statistically processed and interpreted.

Thus, for the first hypothesis a correlation test and a graphical representation using point cloud had been used. I checked the data normality using Kolmogorov-Smirnov procedure. The data was normally distributed and we applied the Pearson correlation coefficient.

Hypothesis no. 1 was determined under two other hypothesis that assumed:

- 1.1. Factors of personality: extraversion, agreeability, openness and conscientiousness, correlated with the efficiency of professional behavior of foster parents (indications for professional success).

- 1.2. Neurotic personality factor with its facets: anxiety, anger, depression, shyness, impulsiveness, vulnerability, correlated with low efficiency of the professional conduct of foster parents (contraindicated for practicing).

Thus, in the following tables and charts are highlighted the results of the first under-hypothesis which affirms that personality factors **extraversion, agreeability, openness and conscientiousness** measured through the NEO-PIR inventory, correlates with the effectiveness of professional behavior, the result of the evaluation grid indicating a complex efficiency behavior of the foster parent.

Table no. 2 - Correlation of extraversion personality factor with professional behavior of foster parent

Correlations

		professional behavior	extraversion
professional behavior	Pearson Correlation	1	,440**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,001
	N	60	60
extraversion	Pearson Correlation	,440**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001	
	N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a positive correlation between the professional behavior measured through the evaluation grid complex and the extraversion personality factor. The correlation coefficient is $r = 0.440$ at a significance level $p = 0.001$.

The existence of a significant positive correlation between extraversion and professional

conduct of foster parents leads to an efficient professional behavior, meaning that a person with personality traits such as sociability, openness, spontaneity, optimism, confidence is a person with efficient professional skills.

So a professional foster care needs these personality traits to be effective professionally.

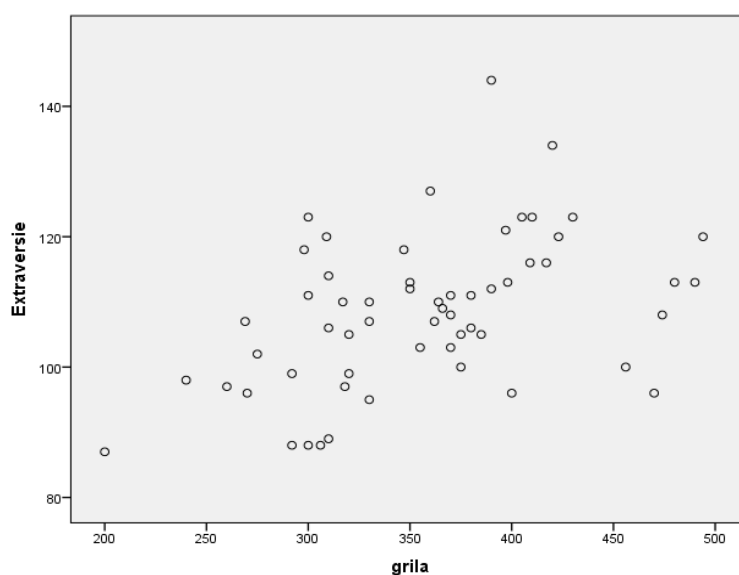


Figure no. 1 - The cloud of points of the following variables: professional behavior and extraversion personality factor.

As can be seen from the above figure, the point cloud is an increasing trend towards the upper right corner, which indicates that there is a direct

correlation between the professional behavior variables and the extraversion personality factor variables.

Table no. 3 - Correlation of opening personality factor with professional behavior of foster parents

Correlations

		Professional behavior	opening
Professional behavior	Pearson Correlation	1	,431**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,001
	N	60	60
Opening	Pearson Correlation	,431**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001	
	N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a positive correlation between the professional behavior variable measured by the evaluation grid complex and the personality factor Openness. The correlation coefficient $r = 0.431$ is significant at $p = 0.001$.

The existence of a significant positive

correlation between openness and professional conduct of foster parents that leads to efficient professional behavior, means that a person with personality traits such as anchoring into present, openness to others, the manifestation of the affection, is a person with an efficient professional behavior.

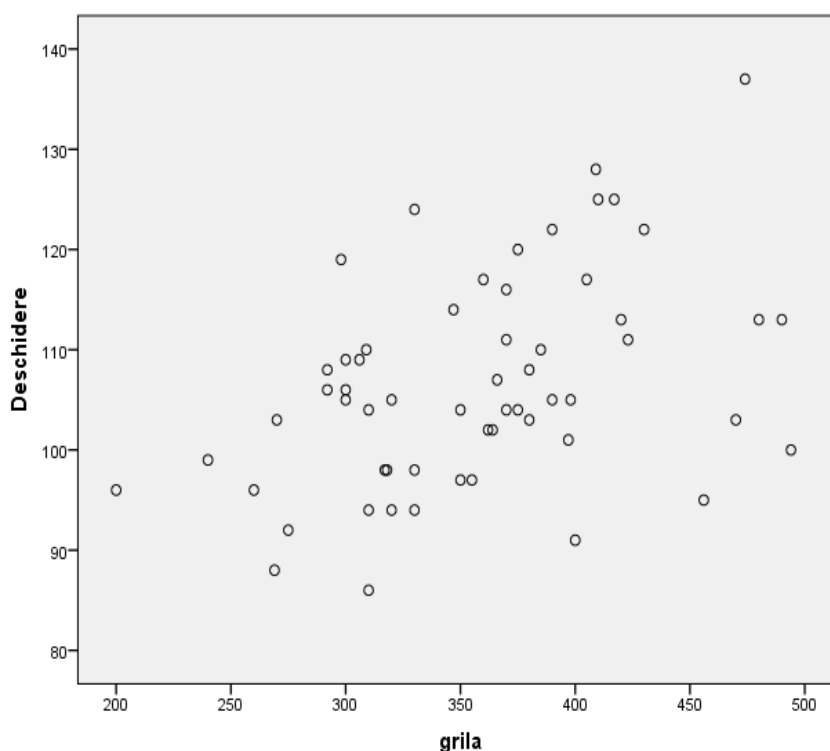


Figure no. 2 - The cloud of points of the two variables (professional behavior and personality openness factor)

As can be seen in the above figure, the point cloud is an increasing trend towards the upper right corner, which shows us that there is a direct correlation

between the variables professional behavior and personality openness factor.

Table. no. 4 - Correlation of agreeableness personality factor with professional behavior of foster parent

Correlations

		Professional behavior	agreeableness
Professional behavior	Pearson Correlation	1	,701**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	60	60
agreeableness	Pearson Correlation	,701**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a strong positive correlation between the professional behavior variable measured by the evaluation grid and the complex personality factor Agreeableness. The correlation coefficient $r = 0.701$ is significant at $p = 0.000$.

The existence of a positive correlation statistically significant between agreeableness and

professional conduct of foster parents leads to efficient professional behavior, meaning that a person with positive personality traits such as: trust, honesty, altruism, kindness, empathy is a person with an efficient professional behavior.

So a professional caregiver needs these personality traits to be professionally efficient.

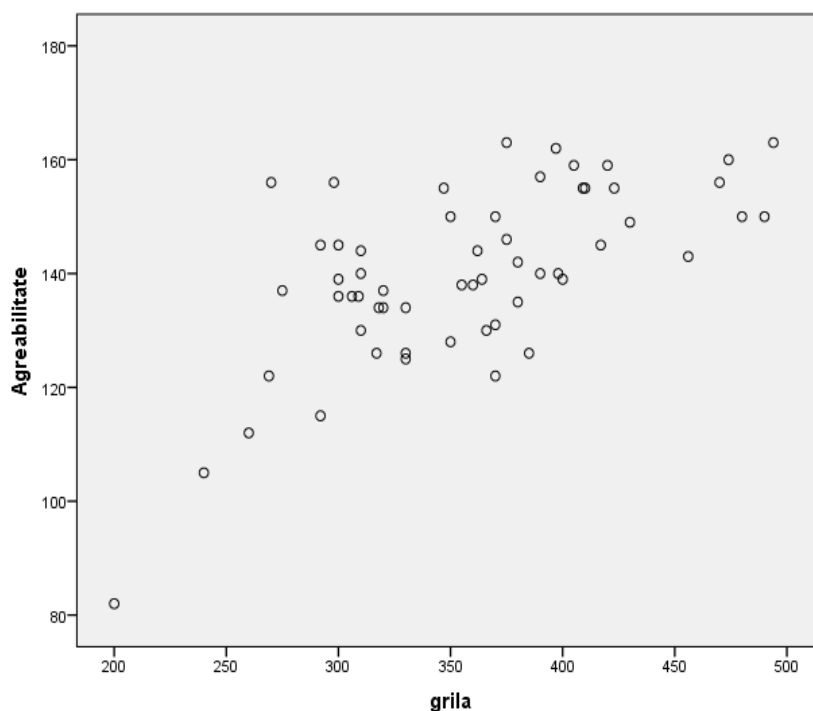


Figure no. 3 - The cloud points of the two variables (professional behavior and agreeableness personality factor)

As can be seen in the above figure, the point cloud is an increasing trend towards the upper right corner, which indicates that there is a direct correlation

between the variables professional behavior and agreeableness personality factor.

Table no. 5 - Correlation of Conscientiousness personality factor with professional behavior of foster parents

Correlations

		Professional behavior	Conscientiousness
Professional behavior	Pearson Correlation	1	,648**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	60	60
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	,648**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation is positive between the professional behavior variable measured by the evaluation grid complex and the Conscientiousness personality factor. The correlation coefficient $r = 0.648$ is significant at $p = 0.000$ materiality.

The existence of a positive correlation

statistically significant between conscientiousness and professional conduct of foster parents leads to efficient professional behavior, meaning that a person with personality traits such as self confidence, sense of duty, self-discipline, perseverance, order, is a person with efficient professional skills.

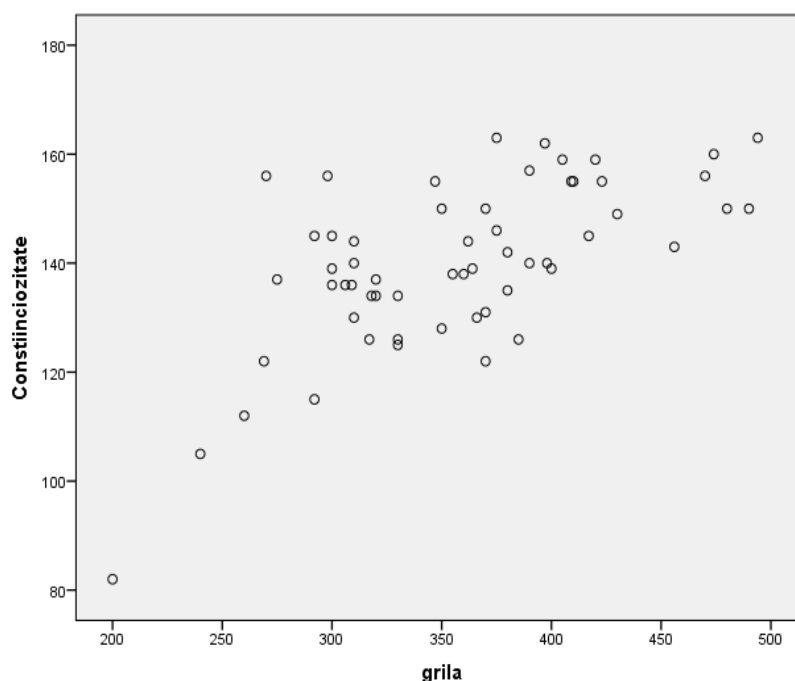


Figure no. 4- The cloud points of variables (professional behavior and conscientiousness personality factor)

As can be seen in the above figure, the point cloud is an increasing trend towards the upper right corner, which indicates that there is a direct correlation between the two variables - professional behavior and conscientiousness personality factor.

Thus, in the table and graph below are shown

the results of the second under-hypothesis which states that the facets of the neuroticism personality factor: anxiety, anger, depression, shyness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability, correlate with low efficiency of the professional conduct of foster parents (contraindicated to exercise the profession).

Table no. 6 - Correlation of neuroticism personality factor with professional behavior of foster parents

Correlations

		Professional behavior	Neuroticism
Professional behavior	Pearson Correlation	1	-,537**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	60	60
Neuroticism	Pearson Correlation	-,537**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a negative correlation between professional behavior measured through the evaluation grid complex and Neuroticism personality factor. The correlation coefficient is $r = -0.537$ at a significance level $p = 0.000$.

The existence of a significant inverted correlation between neuroticism personality factor and

professional conduct of foster parents leads to failure. Thus, the greater neuroticism is, the more decreases the efficiency of the professional behavior. A professional foster parent needs to be effective as the neuroticism facets' scores (anxiety, anger / hostility, shyness, vulnerability to stress, depression, and impulsivity), need to be low and very low.

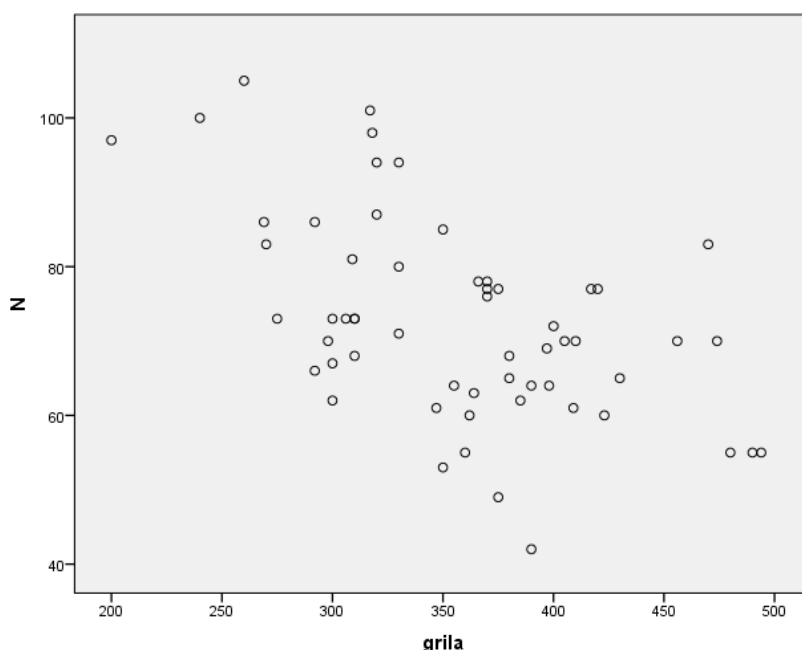


Figure no. 5 - The cloud points of variables professional behavior and neuroticism personality factor.

As can be seen in the above figure, the point cloud has an upward trajectory towards the top left, which shows that there is an inverse correlation between the variables professional behavior and neurotic personality factor.

Statistical interpretation of no. 2 hypothesis' results

According to the third objective of the research, the experimental test and validation of an optimization psycho-behavioral model of the foster

parents – a formative intervention, were statistically processed and the results of the experimental phase were interpreted.

In testing the second hypothesis we had used the comparison between the two samples. I checked this time the normality of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov distribution procedure and homogeneity of variances using the Levene Test. We calculated the main indicators of descriptive statistics: the arithmetic mean, standard deviation and standard error of mean to see if there are differences between the average means of both groups of subjects. Since the conditions of normality and homogeneity were satisfied, we applied the t-test for independent samples to verify if the differences between the means are statistically significant.

The second hypothesis, that assumes that foster parents' participation in the experiential personal development program, will lead to improved personality factors, since there are significant differences between the results obtained before starting the program and after its completion, but also between the experimental group and the control group, is determined by three under-hypothesis:

2.1 We assume that the application of the experiential personal development model leads to a lower neuroticism factor (anxiety, anger, depression, shyness, impulsiveness, vulnerability) of foster parents.

2.2. We assume that the application of the experiential model of personal development leads to the optimization of extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness.

2.3. We assume that between the experimental group and the control group there are significant differences regarding the following parameters: neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness.

So, the experiential techniques used within the personal development group for foster parents led to a decrease of neuroticism with its facets (anxiety, anger, depression, shyness, impulsiveness, vulnerability) and to an increase in extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness. Also, the third under-hypothesis was confirmed, so we can affirm that **between the experimental group and the control group there are significant differences regarding neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness**.

So, the experiential techniques that were used and the active involvement of subjects during the twelve workshops, led to a decrease of neuroticism with its facets: anxiety, anger-hostility, depression, shyness, impulsiveness, vulnerability to stress and to an

increase of factors like extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness, as it is shown by the comparison between the experimental and the control group.

IV. Conclusions

Following the applied, methodology, the formative experiential orientation program conducted did show significant psycho-emotional and behavioral changes, such as:

- The experiential techniques have contributed to a decrease of foster parents' anxiety, who became more confident, relaxed and optimistic, having participated at the formative program.

- Attending the personal development program helped foster parents to express themselves, to introspect, to express frustrations, personal problems, to verbalize painful life events that made them angry before.

- Through the secure created environment and through the support of the whole group, they have managed to create an environment of growth, mutual understanding, sharing painful experiences that led to emotional release and identification of personal resources, becoming more confident and optimistic and less depressed.

- The safety of the group, the unconditional acceptance and the similar experiences lived and shared by everyone, have helped the beneficiaries of the program to feel more relaxed in the presence of others, to find their inner certainty and to become aware of their own value. Thus, the shyness factor decreased after re-testing.

- Going through the personal development program helped foster parents to express and identify their emotions and to feel the group's support and acceptance. They were able to express their traumatic experiences in childhood and adulthood, communicated directly their emotions and began to learn to be more aware of emotional experiences that they repress. After re-testing, there was a decrease of the impulsivity factor.

- Vulnerability to stress decreased after completing the experiential group program. The participants have managed to find solutions to deal with the multiple roles and liability, so they can feel more confident, being able to meet the challenges and professional rigors and at the same time to have personal time and more attention towards themselves.

- The experiential techniques used in the development group helped on developing the capacity of assertiveness. Leaving aside the behavior of passive, "be silent, to be good", they managed to improve their

assertiveness, being able to communicate what I feel, open, without aggression and with confidence.

- Within the experiential group, the foster parents were able to understand the importance of emotional expression, to express their feelings with other participants and to share the feelings of joy, happiness and love.

- They learnt to empathize, to understand the other's perspective, to be more sensitive to the needs of others. While doing a noble work, it can often be felt like a job charge, due to the pressure of too many responsibilities. In the context of the experiential group, they have rediscovered their inner gentleness, empathic ability, resonated with each other, understood each other's life experiences and became more empathetic.

- Awareness of the need for support in terms of time management because of the multitude of responsibilities taken, the need to improve the capacity of the child's integration into the family, social life, education, effective communication with the foster child.

- Positive changes are highlighted by a greater awareness of self in relation to motivation of profession choice and personal development needs of foster parents who participated at the research. Understanding the link between psycho-traumatic life experiences and career choice of foster parents, combined with the awareness of continuing the life scenarios of the predecessors by the substitute parental role, were profound changes that led to ego maturation.

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