

Understanding the Repetitive Transgenerational Life Scenarios in the Case of Professional Foster Parents

Marinela Carmen Grigoreⁱ

Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Ovidius University, Constanta

Abstract

Introduction: *Foster care assistance is a profession many persons, especially women, choose in a conscious way, having different declared motivations, such as: the existence of a profound feeling of love towards children, the compassion towards the children without family, etc. The conscious intentions list may continue, but what lies underneath is a fascinating unconscious world, harbouring repetitions, mainly out of loyalty towards the predecessors.*

Objectives: *1) Developing the understanding of the fact that a significant contribution to the reasons for choosing the foster parent profession, apart from the psychotraumatic situations experienced during childhood and/ or the adult age, is also based in the life experiences of the predecessors. 2) The analysis of the intercorrelation between the inter- and transgenerational losses, the motivation for choosing the profession and the core themes in the life scenarios of the foster parents.*

Methods: *The methods used in the research have been selected in conformity with the objectives: the psychodiagnostic and the qualitative analysis methods.*

Results: *The results of the study confirm a psychodiagnostic value for the formative group program, focussed on the self-development of professional foster parents which leads to significant psycho-emotional and behavioural changes. A result of the research, relevant in improving the manner in which foster care parents interact with children under placement, resides in understanding that the experiences of the predecessors have a significant contribution (see the first objective).*

Another important result of our research is represented by the outlining of the relationships between the trauma generated by the inter and the transgenerational losses experienced by the foster parents and the motivation for choosing this profession, together with the core themes exerted through repetitive life scenarios.

Conclusions: *The research has a psychodiagnostic value, and, at the same time, can find its usefulness in the actual improvement of the relationship between foster parents and the children they are caring for, by helping the first become more present in their role in the lives of the children and to gain more self-awareness and insight in the life scenarios they were playing. Such aspects are also important for the development of a more sanogenous behaviour towards the others, through self-understanding.*

Keywords: *life scenarios, psychotraumatic family history, core themes, loss, abandonment*

ⁱ Corresponding author: univ. lecturer Marinela Carmen Grigore, PhD, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Ovidius University, Constanta, email: marinelagrignore@yahoo.com.

I. Introduction

The theme of this paper has a major importance within the alternative child protection system, both for the child under placement, and for the professional foster parent raising him/ her. The gift of self-awareness, obtained through the experiences lived within the self-development group, leads to a more balanced, realistic, and constructive behaviour, proven to stimulate the self, the family of the foster parent and the children under placement.

The hereby paper comes to complete other researches which drafted the psycho-socio-professional profile of an efficient foster parent, by developing a psychodiagnostic evaluation methodology and a training methodology for the foster parents. The previous researches have also showed the influence of experienced traumatic events both on the children under placement and on the reasons for entering into profession of the foster parents (Grigore, 2015). The present research intends to support and develop this idea of the influence of transgenerational elements in choosing the profession and the intercorrelation between the inter- and transgenerational losses, the professional motivation and the core themes of the foster parents.

From the perspective of the Unification Therapy theory, each family has one or several themes which are maintained at transgenerational level. The identification of the repetitive patterns, of the specific life scenarios of a family and of the core theme represents one of the purposes of the analysis in unification therapy (Mitrofan, Stoica, 2005).

The most frequent types of traumatic experiences we have encountered in the field of foster care are those of *loss* and *loss of attachment*. But we have also seen life scenarios which are based on repeated family *violence* experiences, leading to subsequent fear of death or acts which cannot be morally or ethically justified. (Grigore, 2015). At the same time, related to the choice and nature of the foster care profession (taking care of children being under situations of loss), we have identified that these mirror or are related to the own traumas experienced by the professional foster parents, both during childhood and in the adult life (Grigore, 2015).

The core theme abandonment-loss versus dependency refers to the loss of the identarian space (including metaphorical events, such as: the loss of a house, land; moving from one living space to another, on the grounds of changing the workplace or the need for a larger space; separation from the family of origin (deportations, exile, refuge); losing the family fortune;

the loss of children (by death or adoption); the loss of life partners (by death, disappearance or divorce); the loss of identity (situations of abandonment, adoption, the disappearance of parents, mental illness); loss of health due to somatic conditions (the loss of limbs, of an internal organ, paralysis, etc.). In the case of families unfolding such a scenario, loss and abandonment have a meaning of preservation. The descendants are being passed on a mythology in which loss and abandonment are central themes. Whenever the loss refers to the original identarian space, to emigration, deportation, the scenario centred on loss and abandonment is always correlated with the theme “uprooting versus rooting/ grounding”. The theme of loss and abandonment generates behaviours of dependency and control, by incorporating certain trap-scenarios which are passed on at transgenerational level. “Therefore, the core theme of abandonment-loss versus dependency starts to take shape” (Mitrofan, 2009, p. 241). We can identify the need for control of the professional foster parent through his/ her behaviour towards the child under placement, of whom the foster parent is the sole responsible person in the family. To quote a foster parent, “over my own children I couldn’t have control all the time, I did not educate them how I wanted, my mother-in-law or my husband would always intervene, as they knew better how to raise them” – one can understand that these children ‘belong’ to foster parents, even if for a limited period of time, maintaining the theme of loss, which further generates these behaviours of dependency and control.

Given the wish of the foster care social workers to understand the personal and family history with its specific elements, we have outlined that, besides the psychotraumatic experiences from childhood and/ or the adult period, confirmed likewise in a previous phase of the research (Grigore, 2016), one of the ground reasons for choosing this profession resides in the traumas of their predecessors, passed on through identification with them.

Therefore, due to the quite significant number of foster parents, who had “the love towards children” as underlying motivation for their professional choice, mentioning that they have not experienced psychotraumatic situations, we have asked what exactly determines these women (substitute mothers, in a profound way) to wish to raise children who they subsequently allow to leave to another family environment, either natural or adoptive, perpetuating the trauma of abandonment, separation and loss. In this respect, we identified additional reasons, which we have considered separately, such as the need for a stable

income. However, unfortunately, in reality it is not a motivating revenue compared to the responsibilities, the physical and emotional involvement. Another reason is the regaining of a professional status, knowing that many of the women who have become foster care social workers went through the loss of this status, remaining unemployed. We also noted the need for employment status stability, “to be officially registered as a worker”, as well as the situation of women who were housewives and stay at home mothers, who wanted to be employed and keeping, at the same time, their parental role. Apart from these, on the labour market there exist several other occupations, implying less physical, emotional and time involvement, with fewer changes in the couple and family dynamics, leading us to consider enlarging the area of our research towards unconscious motivations.

Therefore, we have conducted an analysis of the life scenarios of the subjects participating in the experimental phase of the research, within the experiential self-development group, by using as tools/ instruments, among others: the genogram, the art genogram, the analysis of the video recordings. We understood that the professional foster parents suffering losses on the intergenerational level (death of a child, husband or parent, etc.) also had a psychotraumatic transgenerational background, which would repeat in their own life scenario. Therefore, we have considered that this issue must get special attention, so that the results gathered following the process of group psychotherapeutic intervention, through the case studies given for exemplification, may lead to the confirmation of the hypotheses, in accordance with the research objectives.

The drafting of genograms was a significantly emotional moment the foster parents experienced. That scheme on a big sheet of paper represented, in a graphic way, their life, the lives of their parents, grandparents or even of their grand-grandparents. They were fascinated to discover so many relationships with their ancestors, starting from their first name, to resembling life scenarios. At the same extent, they were impressed to notice likelihoods not only on the vertical line, but also on the horizontal level, with the life scenarios of their life partners or of their parents, compared and contrasted. At the final evaluation of the group intervention, the participants were asked what they discovered regarding the motivation for which they had chosen to become professional foster parents. Many of the participants brought to light issues not understood until then, of which only following the group they became aware as being extremely important for what they represented at that moment.

Objectives:

1) To help participants extend their understanding that the underlying motivation for choosing the profession may be linked to the traumatic experiences of the predecessors and the repetition of such events in their own life scenarios, given the loyalty for the predecessors. The participation within the experiential group programme focussed on the self-development of the professional foster parents.

2) To conduct the analysis of the intercorrelation between the inter and the transgenerational losses, the motivation for choosing the profession and the core themes of the foster carers.

Hypotheses:

a) We presuppose that through the experiential self-development group program participation and the use of the methodological instruments specific to transgenerational analysis – the genogram and the art genogram, the foster care social workers become more aware about the transgenerational psychotraumatic factors influencing the choice for and the manner of practising such profession.

b) We presuppose that there is a correlation between the losses suffered by the foster care social worker, including the ones of the predecessors, the motivation for choosing the profession and the core themes comprising their life scenarios.

II. Method

In the study took part 60 professional foster parents from the city of Constanta. Previously, they had been informed about the goal of the research and had agreed to take part in the self-development groups, which lasted for approximately 3 months, having a number of 12 sessions. They participated in all the phases of the research: psychodiagnostic assessment, formative intervention and post-intervention assessment.

Within the formative group intervention, the research sample was divided into an experiential lot and a control lot. Therefore, the experiential group program focussed on the self-development of the foster care professionals (referred to as professional foster parents – PFP). The group program was completed by 30 persons. At the end, all the 60 participants were assessed post-intervention.

The selection of the participants was performed according to the following criteria:

- the family structure: bi-parental and mono-parental family;
- the features of the children under placement: age; number of children under placement; special needs (with disabilities or affected by HIV);

- the number of the children under placement at the moment;
- the period of placement (e.g.: placement for an extended period);
- the environment of origin: rural area and urban area.

The experiential model of group intervention was named “Experiential group program focussed on the self-development of the professional foster parents” and was carried out for a period of 12 sessions, by taking into account several dimensions:

- the optimization of self-development level, in terms of: communication, assertiveness, empathy, self-trust;
- gaining a better understanding of the traumas and of the individual and transgenerational blockages;
- integrating the gender role identity, identifying parental role prescriptions;
- increasing the maturity/ inner growth at emotional, cognitive and behavioural levels.

The experiential model of self-development group in which the professional foster parents were

included was based on the experiential humanistic principles, a series of psychodramatic and art-therapeutic techniques being used in order to facilitate the “here and now” experience of past, present and future life situations.

Therefore, experiential-humanistic working methods and techniques were used in the self-development group programme, adapted to the subjects of our research:

- psychodramatic techniques: role play
- Gestalts restructuring techniques (empty chair, working with the polarities, etc.)
- provocative metaphoric techniques, metaphoric scenarios;
- Rogerian dialogue;
- working with the body, familial sculpture, etc;
- genogram;
- art-genogram;
- creating a metaphoric scenario;
- analysis of the identity-related polarities of the self (the masculine/ feminine, maternal/ paternal polarities).

Table 1: The structure of the experiential self-development group program

Meeting no.	Objectives	Expected results	Techniques used
1	Introduction, inter-knowing and self-awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - getting to know the participants; - the awareness of one’s own expectations; - the self-disclosure through the metaphoric scenario and the self-awareness at the present moment; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rogerian dialogue techniques; - metaphoric scenario;
2	Deepening the inter-knowing. Understanding the motivation to become a foster care social worker.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a better knowledge and group cohesion; - the practice of empathy; - self-disclosure through the metaphoric scenario and self-awareness at the present moment; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rogerian dialogue techniques; - metaphoric scenario; - drawing;
3	The awareness on the different roles: feminine/ masculine, maternal/ paternal and of the maladaptive patterns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - awareness on the psycho-sexual identification models; - identification of the feminine and masculine behavioural patterns; - identification of the feminine and masculine maladaptive patterns; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - metaphoric scenario; - role play; - analysis on the identity related polarities;
4	The connection to the elements of nature, deepening of the self-knowledge, self-awareness, connecting to one’s own feelings, experiences correlated to the elements of nature. The development of the empathic capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - awareness on the creative and self-development potential; - identification of the empathic capacity and its stimulation; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - metaphoric scenario; - role play;
5	Understanding the meaning of the identity related roots, at a symbolic level. The engender of the transgenerational identity related space, in a creative way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - facilitation of the contact with the natural elements; - accessing the family and transgenerational shadow; - understanding the life lessons; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - art-genogram; - metaphoric scenario;
6	Understanding the repetitive life scenarios and the unconscious links with the predecessors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collecting the information related to personal history; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - - genogram;

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identification of the common aspects on the transgenerational level, with focus on the psychotraumatic events and on understanding the significance of the practiced maternal role; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rogerian dialogue techniques;
7	<p>Learning the authentic, open, assertive communication.</p> <p>Awareness on the type of family and couple relations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - awareness on the importance of non-verbal communication; - developing the <i>me</i>, non-violent, empathic communication style; - learning to better communicate through practising of the active learning; - identifying and understanding the types/dynamics of relationships existing in the family which they were unaware of; - optimization of the relationships and of the communication within the family; - exercising the ability to express feelings towards family members; - improving awareness on the pattern of interaction in the couple and in the family; - identification of constructive relational patterns; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rogerian dialogue techniques; - working with the body; - family sculpture; - role play;
8	<p>Awareness on the importance of emotions and of their expression.</p> <p>Awareness on the personal patterns of emotional expression in different situations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - understanding the effects of the emotions on the behaviour and communication, in relation with the others; - understanding the modality for the expression of one's emotions; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - creative techniques of expression through drawing and modelling;
9	<p>Experimenting through music, dance and pantomime the characteristics and functional expression of the basic elements (air, fire, water, earth) (Mitrofan, 2004).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - corporal unblocking, exercising the expressiveness and creativity through the connection with others; - the symbolic corporal, emotional and mental experimenting of the state of being; - connection with the self; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the metaphoric scenario; - working with the body; - Rogerian dialogue techniques;
10	<p>Obtaining corporal awareness, relaxation, communication with one's own body, the awareness on the internal personal resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - practising the connection to one's bodily sensations; - the awareness of one's own body and of the capacity to connect to one's body; - exercising the capacity to relax, to be unstressed; - awareness on the creative and self-improvement potential; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - metaphoric scenario; - Rogerian dialogue techniques; - relaxation techniques;
11	<p>Relaxation and inner focalisation, focusing on identifying new resources in one's inner space, the development of imagination, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - induction of the relaxation technique, inner focalisation; - development of new sensations, personal resources, new solutions to one's own problems; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - metaphoric scenario; - Rogerian dialogue techniques; - relaxation techniques;
12	<p>Re-living of the present moment of each finished stage of the program.</p> <p>Awareness of the effects and of the changes obtained.</p> <p>Final assessment and conclusion of the program, in an appreciative manner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - expressing emotions; - awareness on the positive effects of the experiential group at personal level and concerning the family dynamics; - self-assessment and evaluation of the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rogerian dialogue techniques; - self-assessment and evaluation of the obtained benefits.

III. Results

The research results are in concordance with its objectives and hypotheses. Therefore, the aim to more profoundly understand the motivation for the professional choice of the foster parents who stated in the questionnaire that they had traumatic events in their life history and to discover what stood behind their declared motivation, "the love towards children". Following the use of techniques and instruments for transgenerational analysis, there have been identified traumatic events implying the loss of close ones, at transgenerational level, especially on the maternal line. Thus, we

wanted to see how many of the participants, following the experiential self-development program, have succeeded to experiment, become aware and integrate the link between the trauma of the predecessors, transmitted transgenerationally, and the motivation to take under placement one or several children.

Table 2: The evolution of the arithmetic average during the period under analysis

Group Statistics					
	Test_retest	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Transgenerational_traumas_motivation choice of profession	Before	30	2.03	.718	.131
	After the self-development program	30	3.50	.974	.178

As can be noticed in the above table, the variable professional motivation – transgenerational psychotraumatic history has suffered modifications during the experiential phase, in the sense of its increase. Therefore, at the first testing, we had an average of 2.03 and, after finishing the experiential program, at the second testing, it increased to 3.50.

Table 3: The data normality verification

Normality Tests							
	Test_retest	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Transgenerational_traumas_motivation choice of profession	Before	.184	30	.190	.925	30	.137
	After the self-development program	.231	30	.134	.907	30	.112

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

From the analysis of the Kolmogorov Smirnov indicator, we notice that the value of the coefficient is significant, due to the fact that the threshold of significance is greater than $p=0.05$. Therefore, the data have a normal distribution.

We calculated the homogeneity of the variances for the two data distributions with the aid of Levine coefficient. We obtained $F=6.432$ at a threshold of significance of $p=0.014$, which indicates that we have validated the two conditions for the application of the t test for independent samples, but we are following the values for the non-equal variances in the table with comparisons.

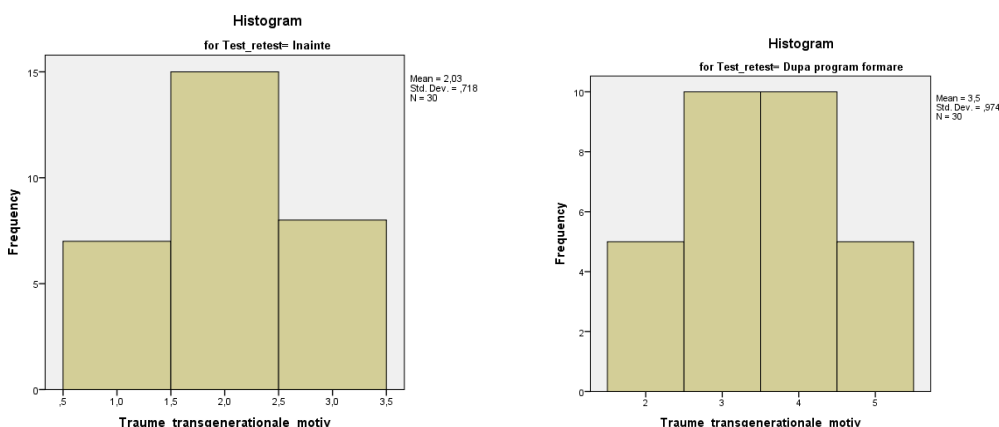
Table 4: The comparison of the results obtained at the experimental lot in regards to the professional motivation variable – Professional Foster Parents (PFP) transgenerational traumas

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levine's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of Difference	
								Lower		Upper
Transgenerational_traumas_motivation choice of profession	Equal variances assumed	6.432	.014	-6.638	58	.000	-1.467	.221	-1.909	-1.024
	Equal variances not assumed			-6.638	53.353	.000	-1.467	.221	-1.910	-1.024

By comparing the two samples, we notice that there are significant differences for the two testings, with regard to the awareness of the existence of transgenerational traumas, reported at the motivation for choosing the profession, as $t=6.638$, at a threshold of significance $p=0.000$. Therefore, we can state that, by completing the self-development experiential group program and with the use of the specific psychotherapeutic techniques (the genogram, the art-

genogram, the metaphoric scenario, the role play, etc.), the professional foster parents, especially the ones choosing this profession with the declared motivation *love towards children*, have attained a more profound awareness, namely of the unconscious relation between the choice for this profession (substitution mother), with the psychotraumatic background of the predecessors. The significant differences obtained between the two testing periods can also be noticed from the figure below.

Figure 1: Comparative analysis of the responses for the two testing periods - professional motivation - transgenerational traumas



At the same time, in relation to the second objective of the research, one can notice in the table below that the motivation for choosing the profession correlates with the core themes, and the life scenarios are saturated with traumatizing situations, both at the inter- and transgenerational level, having as basis the loss under all its forms.

Table 5: Inter and transgenerational losses - professional motivation - Core themes Professional Foster Parents (PFP)

No	Traumatizing situations stated by the foster carer	Transgenerational traumatizing situations	The motivation for choosing the profession of PFP	Core themes
1	Chronic disease/ hospital admissions of the mother. Death of her mother (the person was 7 years old at the time). Authoritarian father, emotional violence.	Deported maternal great-grandparents. The maternal grandmother also raised her granddaughters. The paternal grandfather deceased in war.	<i>There was a time when my children were growing up and I felt lonely. I felt the need to give my love to somebody.</i>	- rooting/ uprooting; - abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
2	Medical condition/ her mother got into hospital several times (in her childhood). The person has raised her younger sister.	The paternal grandmother passed away at a young age. The paternal grandfather deceased in war.	<i>When my children were young, I used to work in shifts, but decided to give up the work in order to stay with them at home. So, I wanted to help other children, also.</i>	- strength/ weakness; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
3	Fatherless (childhood). She is taking care of her mother. Divorce.	The paternal grandfather deceased at a young age. The grandmother had 11 children, raised them by herself and also raised her granddaughter.	<i>I felt I could offer affection to other children as well.</i>	- strength/ weakness; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
4	Death of the younger brother (as a child). Death of the husband.	The maternal grandmother was a widow (husband deceased in war), re-married with a man who also had children and raised them as well. The husband's father was an orphan.	<i>When my husband died, my child was young and I had to stay with him at home and so I took children under placement.</i>	- abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.

5	Not married (she is the first-born daughter). Death of her father. Death of her sister-in-law (she raised her sister-in-law's children after her passing away).	Her mother was the first-born daughter after two twin pregnancies, stillborn. Doing the same as the maternal granddaughter, after her brother drowned. Her mother was also a professional foster parent. The first-born brother is not married – like her first-born daughter, who did not marry.	<i>Due to the fact that I did not have my own biological children, I thought that this job is a very good solution, because I love children very much.</i>	- femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
6	Biological father missing. Medical condition/ admissions into hospital of the mother (when the participant was a child). Death of the biological child.	The paternal grandmother deceased at a young age. Adoptive father – orphan, adopted, history of violence.	<i>After the death of my little girl, I felt hopeless.</i>	- abandonment/ dependency; - strength/ weakness; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
7	Death of the father (when the participant was a child). Death of the husband.	The paternal grandmother died during child labour; adoption of her father; the death of the adoptive father (grandfather).	<i>My children were young and I wanted to help other children also, who needed a mother.</i>	- abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
8	Death of a younger brother. No relationship with her mother. Divorce.	The maternal grandparents were both orphans.	<i>I decided to stop working in shifts, to better take care of my children and to offer affection to another child, also.</i>	- abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
9	Death of the mother (when the participant was a child). Separated brothers (raised by the sisters and by the paternal grandmother). Divorce.	The maternal grandmother deceased at a young age.	<i>My son, of three years old, needed brothers, to not grow alone. Thus, I chose this job and I now have a job and younger brothers for my son.</i>	- abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
10	Violence of the father. Divorce of the parents. Child with special needs.	On the paternal line, there is no information. On the maternal line – the mother is the first born, with 6 more brothers. Masculine/ paternal aggression.	<i>My child had health problems and I decided to stay at home to be able to take care of her and of the children under placement, because I love them very much.</i>	- abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
11	Violence of the father. Physical traumas (at the level of the legs) due to violence. Mother leaving for long periods of time.	The mother the eldest daughter has a previous marriage (children). Her paternal grandmother was an orphan, following the premature death of her parents. She was raised by an aunt. The paternal grandfather lost his father as a child.	<i>I like children, and my children grew quite a lot. I am coming from a family with a lot of children, I've always liked, all the time, to have my house full.</i>	- abandonment/ dependency; - strength/ weakness; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
12	Divorce. No biological children.	The maternal grandmother grew for some years without father, as he was away fighting in the war. On the family line of the husband, his father died at a young age, him remaining the eldest boy.	<i>I wanted a child, I adopted one and, then, I have chosen to stay with him and to take care of other children, also, lacking affection.</i>	- abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
13	The absence of the parents for a long period of time (physically and emotionally) – was raised by her grandmother.	Her mother was 2 years old when her father died. Her grandmother was a widow, raised her children and, then, the children of her second husband, including the person (the granddaughter).	<i>After the adoption of the boy, I still wanted to see and take care of other children. Not being able to have other biological children, I decided that I could give motherly love to other children too.</i>	- abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.

14	Father left for long periods of time. She is not married.	Her mother was raised by her grandmother (great grandmother of the participant). The maternal grandmother was left fatherless at the age of 2.	<i>It was a period when I wanted to give and receive unconditional love. I love children very much!</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
15	Death of her husband.	The paternal grandfather deceased at a young age (her father was 3 at the time). The maternal grandfather disappeared in war. The maternal grandmother deceased at a young age (her mother was 3 at the time). Her mother was raised by the great grandmother, together with other children.	<i>I was a widow, (I had) an adult son and a lot of love and help to offer.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
16	Father gone for long periods of time. Death of a child. Divorce.	The maternal grandmother died at 36 years old, her mother (7 years of age) being raised by an aunt/ her father left her. Paternal grandmother – died at 36 years old (her son was 7 at the time).	<i>After 29 years of work, I considered that I can be useful and help an abandoned child.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
17	Violence of the father. Death of the father.	The maternal grandfather had an extramarital relationship, resulting in a child (secret). One of her mother's sisters died by arson.	<i>When my father died.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strength/ weakness; - victim-aggressor; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
18	Death of the husband.	On her father's line – death of his father.	<i>After my husband died, the company went bankrupt, we were sacked and people were talking about this, so I thought I could take a child in foster.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
19	Chronic illness of the husband, followed by death.	The maternal grandmother died at a young age (her daughter was 9 years old).	<i>My children were grown up at the time.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
20	The loss of an advanced pregnancy/ the lack of biological children.	No known data.	<i>I had lost a pregnancy, I could never get pregnant again, but, out of the need to have a young child in the house, I said to myself to become a foster parent.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
21	Violence, divorce of the parents. Lost pregnancy. The lack of a biological child.	No known data.	<i>I love children very much and as I could not have biological children, I got employed, also with the possibility to adopt.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strength/ weakness; - victim/ aggressor; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
22	No declared personal history of trauma.	Both maternal grandparents had migrated from other countries. The paternal grandfather was killed. The grandmother re-married, also raising the husband's children. On the line of the husband, his father died when he and his brother were 3 years old.	<i>I was unemployed, the children were young and I felt the need for a change in my life; I could offer love and protection to other children too.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rooting/ uprooting; - abandon/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
23	No declared personal history of trauma.	The maternal grandmother died when her mother was 20 years old. The mother raised her younger brothers.	<i>My children were in school, my husband was out of the country and I decided to become a foster parent (by myself).</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - abandonment/ dependency; - strength/ weakness; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.

		The husband's mother died early, when her husband was 14 years old.		
24	No declared personal history of trauma. Death of the first-born brother (6 months).	The maternal grandfather was deported. Her mother's brothers all die. They are followed by the grandfather. On her father's line – 5 brothers died at birth.	<i>The biological children were young, and I was a housewife and so I decided that I could take and care after another member from outside the family, to provide them a home and love.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rooting/ uprooting; - abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.
25	No declared personal history of trauma.	The paternal grandmother died when the father of the foster parent was only one year old, being raised by a paternal aunt. On the line of the father, his own father died when he was one.	<i>Being a housewife with young children, I decided, together with the family, that I could offer family support to another child as well.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - abandonment/ dependency; - femininity/ masculinity; - maternity/ paternity.

According to the wider picture of the correlated inter- and transgenerational losses, of the motivation to choose this profession and the core themes of the foster parents taking part in the study, one can conclude that all these researched elements are interconnected, the motivation for the professional choice having as basis the need to heal traumas suffered at inter- and at transgenerational levels.

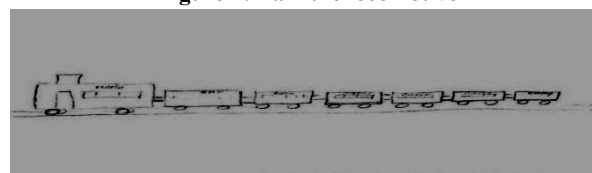
In order to support the previously exposed assertions, we intend to briefly present one case study, showing both the therapeutic value of the self-development group and the level of awareness in relation to the fact that, at the core of the choice for the professional foster parent profession, apart from the psychotraumatic situations experienced during childhood and/ or adult life, the adversities lived by the predecessors have a significant contribution.

Therefore, we further notice the psychotraumatic experiences lived by the foster parents and their perception and reference to them – the events experienced directly during childhood or adulthood, or incorporated, by loyalty to the predecessors, and how these led to the professional choice (facts of which they became aware during the self-development group sessions). Using as diagnostic tools the genogram and the artgenogram and having as objectives to understand the symbolical meaning of the identity roots and the creative construction of the transgenerational identarian space, the group participants became aware of their life experiences in relation with the ones lived by their predecessors.

During the experiential self-development group, Mrs. N. referred to herself as being a locomotive, called MOTHER, which carries, pulls, and leads other six wagons. The first wagon, smaller than the others, symbolizes her daughter, who is also a professional

foster parent, partnering in the professional journey and not only. The smaller wagons symbolize the 4 children currently under placement and another child with special needs, with whom, although not living in their family, she keeps in touch constantly. Mrs. N. is the one leading, directing, pulling others after her, being responsible, in control, directing other people depending on her. The chosen direction of travel, according to the time axis, is one from right to left, indicating that the locomotive is oriented towards the past.

Figure 2: I am the locomotive



I am the locomotive

In a different session, Mrs. N. succeeded to express all her painful feelings experienced in her childhood, in relation with the very distant, cold, absent and unable of support parental figures. Her grandmother has the central role, the parents leaving the girl in the woman's care since she was a few months old and visiting her there from time to time (situation perceived as abandonment). They would take her to live with them only after she turned 10 years old. She stated that, through foster parenting, her dream of having more children in the family came true, allowing her to offer them what she could not receive. Therefore, within the background of parental abandonment, we could identify the motivation underlying the desire of becoming a foster parent, the need for protection and taking care of children who, in their turn, are abandoned by their parents:

“My childhood was spent at my grandmother’s house in the countryside, because my parents left, moved to Constanta, and I was left with my grandmother. I felt very well with my grandmother. When they came and then left, I would cry and they would tell me, ‘come on, mother would come back’ and so, the years passed until I was in the 3rd grade... In the 3rd grade they took me to Constanta... It was difficult... because I did not love them very much... they were almost strangers to me. I do not say they did not love me, but they did not show it and nor did I feel it... and this coldness continued and is still going on at the present moment. I do not recall my mother taking me in her arms, to kiss me or to come and tell me ‘Come to me to kiss you’. I was sick and I would say: ‘I am sick and she would tell me: ‘Everybody is sick...’

There are things that stayed with me. And then I told myself: **‘I want many children, I want more children, I shall have many children, 3, 4, 5, to have my house full of children and my children shall never go through what I have been through!’**

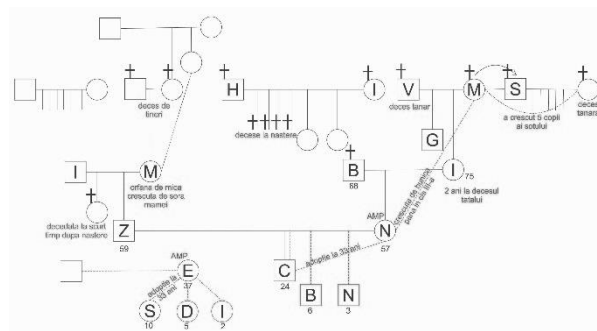
God did not want it, I gave birth to only one child, so I decided to adopt a child, and they would not support me, my family, his family, as long as you have your own child, why adopt another one? In my mind, I would not stop at a single adoption, I wanted to adopt more, but the times would not let me. Yes, for me, children are my soul... Irrespective of the child, they can be one from the street, it doesn’t matter his/ her ethnicity, he/ she is a child and I know that that child, in their soul, is a child and that he/ she wants something, he/ she probably has an empty space there, he/ she is either hungry or someone forces them and sends them to beg... I cannot refuse anything children ask me”.

Within the therapy sessions in which we aimed to understand the symbolical meaning, the identity roots, through art-genogram, a moment full of emotion was created, in trying to build one’s identity space, inter- and transgenerational. Being a parental child, without the affection of the mother or the father, she is in control (the locomotive), she is positioning herself in the centre, very big, with the need for the confirmation of her identity and of her personal resources (being a ‘permanently green pine tree with fruits’), while her husband is symbolized on the left side, as a branch of smaller dimensions, at a distance from her; her father, symbolized by three seeds, separates the two partners. The children of the family are all depicted the same, irrespective of their age, degree of relationship and parentage (natural daughter, adoptive son, children under placement), all are yellow flowers placed on the right side, the sunny part, she describes:

“On this side (the right side) the daughter; the son, the younger children, the part which was full of light and is always full of light. Around me, flowers, butterflies... and that’s all. I tell my children to be as they have been so far, I am proud of them; they are the meaning of my life! I love the younger children I have under placement, as my own children, I am proud of them, I am proud of myself that I can be besides them and I can give them advice I am sure will help them choose the right path in life... I have forgiven my father for everything that happened, but I cannot forget... As for my mother, I want her to be better, more understanding and to love her fellows, at least now at this age. My grandmother... was what was best for my soul and I thank her for everything!”

The identification of the connected aspects in the intergenerational plan, but also in the transgenerational one, with accent on understanding the significance of the exercising of the maternal role; the awareness and understanding of the repetitive life scenarios and of the unconscious links with the predecessors were objectives proposed within the session, in which we worked with the art-genogram.

Figure 3: The genogram of mrs. N.



From the above genogram, one can notice that N. (57 – the professional foster parent) was raised by her maternal grandmother who, being a widow, raised her biological children together with the five children of her second husband’s previous marriage. N. has a biological daughter (E.) and an adopted son (C.). E. is also a foster parent, has not married and has an adopted daughter (S.), initially in foster care, similarly with E.’s adoptive brother. Both the mother and daughter adopted children at the age of 33. The paternal grandmother lost both her parents, being an orphan child and was raised by an aunt.

Analysing both the information from the genogram, as well as obtained from other sessions, we know of mrs. N.’s loyalty towards her maternal grandmother, also an orphan child, having lost both her

parents. At the same time, we understand the mother-daughter fusion, each generation seemingly saving the previous one, through compensatory actions with the role of filling that “empty space”, of repairing the unlawfulness of the loss, abandonment, separation, actions which bring to the forefront a life scenario with core themes such as abandonment/ dependency; femininity/ masculinity; maternity/ paternity.

Table 6: Inter- and transgenerational losses – professional motivation – core themes, mrs. N.

Psychotraumatic situations stated by the foster parent	Transgenerational traumatizing / psycho-traumatic situations	The motivation for choosing to be professional foster parent – PFP	Core themes
The absence of the parents for a long period of time (physical and emotional abandonment) – was raised by the grandmother.	Mother loses her father at the age of 2. The grandmother, left a widow, raises her own children, her second husband's children and then her grandchildren.	<i>“After the boy's adoption I still wanted to see and take care of other children. Not being able to have other biological children, I decided to give the motherly love to other children.”</i>	- abandonment/ dependency/ control - femininity/ masculinity - maternity/ paternity

Please see below some of the responses gathered from the participants in the research, which confirm the change of perspective and of the level of understanding for the professional choice, with profoundly individual and maternal implications:

- *“I understood I was predestined for this profession”;*
- *“I discovered that this profession was somehow taken over from my grandparents. In practice, a continuation of offering love and protection to others”;*
- *“To know the roots and the similarities I share with my family, this is what interested me!”;*
- *“I have discovered that my maternal grandmother also had the same love for children, and, the most important thing seemed to me to be the art genogram” (mrs. N.).*

IV. The limits of the research

The experiential self-development group program can be extended for a larger number of foster parents, even for persons wishing to embrace this profession in order to be more self-aware and in a greater

psycho-emotional balance. The positive feedbacks received from the participants in the group, including after a longer period of time following the conclusion of the program can help us both to conduct an impact assessment and an evaluation of the changes generated in the personal, familial and professional areas and to confirm that the study can be extended and applied to the network of foster parents from the entire country. At the same time, we believe that the extension of the duration of the training program (an increased number of meetings with the foster parents within the group) would be much more beneficial and would bring more profound changes, fact expressed by the participants at the end of the program.

V. Conclusions

Referring to the formative dimension of the entire self-development program, the hypotheses have been confirmed, existing significant differences between the two testings, test, re-test and between the results obtained between the research lots, the experimental and the witness one. The validation of this formative model of self-development, having the aim of assisting professional foster parents developing their Self, building and consolidating the specific professional competences, was done through the test re-test method or the post-intervention assessment of the experimental lot of the research and through testing the significant differences between the experimental lot and the control one, of the behavioural variables: personality factors (*neuroticism, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness*), professional behaviour (*professional competences, abilities of self-knowledge, the awareness of the need for self-optimization* – Grigore, 2014, 2016); psychotraumatic background (*the understanding of the relationship between the psychotraumatic factors and the motivation for the career choice* – Grigore, 2016).

Therefore, we can identify that the positive changes are also expressed through a greater level of self-awareness in relation to the motivation for choosing the profession and with the need for self-improvement of the participating foster parents within the formative program of the research (Grigore, 2015). Understanding the connection between their psychotraumatic life experiences and the choice for the profession, cumulated with the awareness on the repetition of the life scenarios of the predecessors, through the substitutive parental role, have represented profound changes which led to the development of Self and inner growth.

Thus, a qualitative aspect of the study, which cannot be quantified, resides in the surprising and

healing awareness of the identification with the predecessors, with the maternal figures who also had the same life themes that the offsprings are carrying further. Through the genogram, they have discovered links with their parents, grandparents or great grandparents, which led them to choose this profession with a profound parental role, elements not understood until then. The inner growth implies a rearrangement, a restructuration and a re-balancing of the Self, through entering in contact with their roots and the assumption of what *I am*, through the contact with their resources and the awareness of what *I can do*, through the change of perspective into a more meaningful one, with the potential, optimism and acceptance, that they further transmit to the most important ones for their existence, namely the children.

To conclude, the research shall have an echo for the professionals dealing with child protection, new methods of assessment and support being necessary, adapted to the profound, psycho-emotional needs of the foster parents.

*
* *

References

- Badea, V., Mitrofan, L. (2004). *Dimensiuni ale excluderii sociale (Dimensions of social exclusion)*. Bucharest: Ed. SPER (SPER Publishing House).
- Brundl, P., Kogan, I. (2006) *Copilăria dincolo de trauma și străinătate (Childhood besides trauma and foreignness)*. Bucharest: Editura Fundației Generația (Generatia Foundation Publishing House).
- Cyrulnik, B. (2005). *Murmurul fanomelor (The murmur of phantoms)*. Bucharest: Ed. Curtea Veche (Curtea Veche Publishing House).
- Enache, R. (2003). *O perspectivă psihologică asupra maternității (A psychological perspective on maternity)*. Bucharest: Ed. SPER (SPER Publishing House).
- Grigore, M. C. (2014). Psycho-Socio-Professional Aspects of Foster Care in Romania. *Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy*, vol. 17, no 4 (68), p. 30-46.
- Grigore, M. C. (2015). *The assessment and the self-improvement of professional foster parents for the formation of specific professional competences*. PhD Thesis, coordinated by PhD prof. Iolanda Mitrofan, University of Bucharest, The Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences.
- Grigore, M. C. (2016). Psychotraumatology Aspects Highlighted in the Personal and Transgenerational History of Professional Foster Parents, in Relation to Career Choice. *Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy*, vol. 19, no. 4 (76), p. 17-34.
- Grigore, M. C. (2016). *Repere psiho-sociale ale evaluării în asistența maternală (Psycho-social benchmarks of the assessment in foster care)*. Craiova: Ed. Sitech (Sitech Publishing house).
- Grigore, M. C. (2016). The Experiential Orientation, a Good Practice Model in the Assessment and Professional Training of Foster Parents in Romania. *Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy*, vol. 19, no. 1 (73), p. 22-38.
- Mitrofan, I. (2004). *Terapia Unificării (The Unification Therapy)*. Bucharest: Ed. SPER (SPER Publishing House).
- Mitrofan, I. (coord), Godeanu, C. D., Godeanu A. S. (2009). *Vocabularul analizei transgeneraționale (The vocabulary of transgenerational analysis)*. Bucharest: Ed. SPER (SPER Publishing House).
- Mitrofan, I., Buzducea, D. (2011). *Consilierea și terapia centrată pe traumă (Counselling and therapy focussed on trauma)*. Bucharest: Ed. SPER (SPER Publishing House).
- Mitrofan, I., Godeanu, D. C, Godeanu, A. S. (2010). *Psihogenealogia (Psychogenealogy)*. Bucharest: Ed. SPER (SPER Publishing House).
- Mitrofan, I., Petre, L. (2013). *Art-genograma. Diagnoza și terapia unificatoare transgenerațională (Art genogram. The transgenerational unifying diagnosis and therapy)*. Bucharest: Ed. SPER (SPER Publishing House).
- Mitrofan, I., Stoica, D. (2005). *Analiza transgenerațională în Terapia Unificării (The transgenerational analysis in the Unification Therapy)*. Bucharest: Ed. SPER (SPER Publishing House).
- Ruppert, F. (2012). *Traumă, atașament, constelații familiale. Psihoterapia traumei (Trauma, attachment, family constellations. Trauma psychotherapy)*. Bucharest: Ed. Trei (Trei Publishing House).
- Schutzenberber, A. (2012). *Psihogenealogia (Psychogenealogy)*. Bucharest: Ed. Trei (Trei Publishing House).
- Vasile, D. (2012). *Trauma familială și resursele compensatorii (Family trauma and the compensatory resources)*. Bucharest: Ed. SPER (SPER Publishing House).