

## **A mentalization-based integrative intervention for looked-after-children and their foster-carers**

Dana Lassri<sup>a,b,c</sup>; Peter Fonagy<sup>a,b</sup>; Nick Midgley<sup>a,b</sup>; Eia Asen<sup>b</sup>; Patrick Luyten<sup>a,b,d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Research Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology, University College London, London, UK; <sup>b</sup> The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, London, UK; <sup>c</sup> The Haruv Institute, Israel; <sup>d</sup> Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven, Belgium.

### **Abstract**

More than 45% of Looked-after-children (LAC) placed in foster-care have a diagnosable mental health disorder—five times the prevalence of mental health disorder among children in the general population. However, despite the significant necessity to reduce the risk of emotional and behavioural problems in LAC—particularly as such difficulties increase the risk of instability of foster-care, which in turn is associated with poorer outcomes—evidence suggests that there is still an urgent need for the development and evaluation of evidence-based interventions for LAC. Contemporary mentalizing theory offers a potential integrative framework, given its focus on the role of social learning associated with secure attachment and solid mentalizing, and the considerable empirical support found among individuals characterized by severe early adversity. First, the study discusses meta-analyses and qualitative reviews of existing interventions for LAC, with the aim of identifying strengths, weaknesses, and potentially effective components. Building on the above, the study presents an integrative stepped-care, modular, multi-componential intervention for LAC and their foster-carers, rooted in mentalizing theory. The proposed intervention consists of four modules, aimed at empowering and facilitating strengths and resilience in LAC and their foster-carers, with an assessment component that defines criteria to be referred to the next module: Module-1: A psycho-educational programme—foster-carers' initial training; Module-2: Multi-family groups; Module-3: A brief family-based intervention; Module-4: Individual psychotherapy for children and/or foster-carers with complex difficulties, and high risk for placement breakdown. Contemporary mentalizing theory offers a comprehensive integrative framework for a potentially widely implemented intervention for LAC and their foster-carers.

*Keywords:* Foster-care; interventions; mentalization-based therapy

Dana Lassri, [d.lassri@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:d.lassri@ucl.ac.uk) ; [Danalassri@gmail.com](mailto:Danalassri@gmail.com)

Address and telephone number at work: Research Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology, University College London (UCL) and The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families.

1-19 Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HB, UK.

Address and telephone number at home: 36 Sirkin Street, Holon, Israel.

Telephone: +972 (0) 50 8568375

Abstract for the Second Haruv International Conference on Child Maltreatment

### **Mediation in foster care: new challenges for social intervention**

Mediation is a concept with multiple senses that is used in several areas of intervention, namely the family and school. In this work, mediation is located beyond mere intermediation or conflict resolution, which seeks an agreement between disgruntled parties, to signify a form of creation and / or transformation of knowledge and forms of coexistence. The educational mediator accompanies the subject in this process that belongs to him, educating, to develop and evaluate. We thus share Mari's (2010) perspective, when she affirms that mediation exists to prevent participation and social cohesion, favoring access and solidifying the ties to a culture. The starting point of this reflection is precisely to delimit the field of socio-educational mediation, to identify the forms that it assumes and the set of competences that mobilize.

In maltreatment contexts, some children have to go to foster care, residential care or adoption. Foster care involves a multiplicity of protagonists and a web of contacts and relationships, where socio-educational mediation not only takes place but is essential for achieving the desired results, according to the project defined for the children.

This paper presents the results of a study about the contact in the foster care, in Porto district, Portugal (2016), where the role of mediation is evident. Finally, it ends with a reflection on the characteristics that socio-educational mediation can assume in foster

care, the implications it poses and the challenges associated with it. It concludes with the presentation of a set of proposals or practice.

**Key Words: Child Maltreatment; Mediation; Foster Care; Contact**

Author:

**Paulo Delgado** - Professor at the Porto School of Education – Polytechnic of Porto;  
Member of InED, of Porto School of Education and CIEC, of Universidade do Minho,  
Portugal. pdelgado@ese.ipp.pt - Tel: 00351 (96) 2952039

Co-Authors:

**Friso Ross** - Professor of Law at the Erfurt Faculty of Applied Social Sciences

**Inkje Sachau, M.A.** - Lecturer at the Erfurt Faculty of Applied Social Sciences

## **A presentation proposal for the conference "Child Maltreatment in Context"**

**December 7-8, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem**

**Title:** "A girl's place is in the home": A critical analysis of spatial gendered scripts in narratives of runaway girls

**Presenters:** Einat Peled, The Bob Shapell School of Social work, Tel Aviv University

Michal Komem, School of Social Work, Sapir Academic College

**Correspondence:** Einat Peled, School of Social Work, Tel Aviv University, Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv 69978, [einatp@post.tau.ac.il](mailto:einatp@post.tau.ac.il), 052-8797263

**Key words:** runaway girls, gendered scripts, feminist qualitative research

### **Abstract**

Most girls who run away from home escape emotional, physical or sexual abuse. Yet, commonly, their distress and victimization continue and even intensify also when being away from home. Little is known about the unique experiences of runaway girls and there is almost no discussion of the gendered social context of this phenomenon. This critical-feminist study regards the body and movement of girls as expressions of personal agency, as well as sites of firm social control. Our goal was to examine whether and how social values and directives regarding home as the proper place for girls are being reflected in the narratives of girls who ran away from home. We conducted a critical interpretive analysis of interviews with 17 girls (ages 14-21) who ran away from home. We found references to the impact of gendered social control mechanisms on three critical junctions related to the girls' running away from home: 1) delaying or avoiding leaving home even when they suffered in it; 2) making an effort to maintain resemblance of expected normative gendered behavior when in the street; 3) describing encounters with social control agents directed mostly at relocating the girls to a socially acceptable place, i.e., home. The discussion centers on the potential impact of social norms on the perceptions and actions of runaway girls and on the support provided to them by helping professionals.