



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## The development of children in foster care

Goemans, A.

### Citation

Goemans, A. (2017, June 27). *The development of children in foster care*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/51103>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/51103>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/51103> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

**Author:** Goemans, A.

**Title:** The development of children in foster care

**Issue Date:** 2017-06-27



GENERAL DISCUSSION



## GENERAL DISCUSSION

This dissertation focused on the development of children in foster care and it was examined which characteristics related to the foster child, the foster family, and the foster placement are associated with the development of foster children. We aimed to deepen the understanding of conditions that are conducive to foster children's positive development. This dissertation started with two chapters that provide a systematic overview of the literature on foster children, by means of meta-analyses. *Chapter 2* illustrated that children in foster care lag behind children from the general population with respect to their cognitive, adaptive and behavioral functioning. No clear differences in functioning were found between foster children and children at risk who remained at home. In *Chapter 3* it was shown that the combined results suggest no overall increase or decrease in adaptive and behavioral functioning of foster children during their stay in the foster family.

The other four chapters in this dissertation concern the results of our empirical study on the development of children in foster care. *Chapter 4* illustrated that especially foster placement characteristics (in particular interventions aimed at foster children) are related to foster children's psychosocial functioning. *Chapter 5* suggested that foster children's behavior problems have an effect on foster parents' stress, but not vice versa. *Chapter 6* demonstrated that the school engagement of foster children is predicted by both general and foster care specific predictors. In *Chapter 7* we concluded that the Brief Assessment Checklist (BAC) functions well and may become a valuable tool for screening and monitoring foster children's development in the Netherlands. In the current chapter we will reflect on the results of the preceding chapters. We discuss the limitations of the studies presented in this dissertation and directions for future research are given.

### **Finding the Best Placement Setting for Children in the Child Welfare System**

Many foster children come from troubled backgrounds and might have experienced childhood adversities such as child abuse and neglect (Dubner & Motta, 1999; Greeson et al., 2011; Oswald et al., 2010; Turney & Wildeman, 2017). The troubles experienced by the children have marked the development and functioning of some of the children before they actually entered foster care (Bai, Leon, Garbarino, & Fuller, 2016; Jiménez-Morago, León, & Román, 2015). We illustrated, by means of meta-analyses, that foster children's level of cognitive, adaptive and behavioral functioning is significantly lower than that of children from the general population. Our aim was not only to give an overview of foster children's functioning in relation to that of children in the general population, but we also aimed to provide evidence about living arrangements for children in the child welfare system that best accommodate their developmental and educational needs. It is especially this second aim that deserves further discussion. Decision making in child welfare has important implications for children, families and their environments (Jones, 1993). Decisions with respect to actual out of home placement or not might be considered as the most challenging (Lindsey, 1992). We tried to provide some input for taking this difficult decision by systematically comparing developmental outcomes of children in foster care and children at risk who remained at

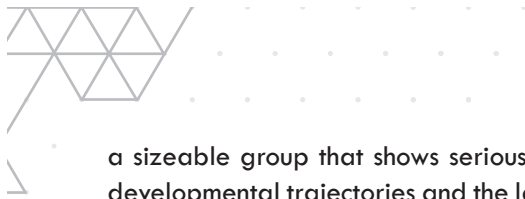
home. Our meta-analysis shows that based on developmental outcomes there is no compelling evidence that either foster care or remaining at home should be preferred over the other. Children in foster care showed similar developmental outcomes in terms of cognitive, adaptive, and behavioral functioning compared to children at risk who remained at home. This similarity, however, should not trigger indifference with respect to placement decisions. Decision making is a balancing act of complex risk assessment and ensuring child safety and well-being (Fluke, Corwin, Hollinshead, & Maher, 2016). Both evidence-based models that guide these decisions and home-based interventions to support families and to prevent out-of-home placement should be further developed in order to support the professionals and ensure the safety and well-being of children (Berrick, Peckover, Pösö, & Skivenes, 2015; Dijkstra, Creemers, Asscher, Deković, & Stams, 2016; Keddell, 2016; Lee et al., 2014; Lindsey, 1992; Meiksans, Iannos, & Arney, 2015; Schweitzer, Pecora, Nelson, Walters, & Blythe, 2015).

### **The Development of Children in Foster Care**

In light of the new Youth Act that recently came into effect in the Netherlands, child welfare policies are aimed to prevent out of home placement by means of strengthening families and their social networks and by providing additional support services. If remaining at home, however, is not an option, whether or not temporarily, foster care is preferred over other placement options like group care (Dozier et al., 2014; Ministerie van VWS & Ministerie van VenJ, 2014; Roy et al., 2000; Webster et al., 1999; Wilson & Conroy, 1999). It is hoped that foster care offers a good living arrangement for foster children and gives them an opportunity to recover from their past experiences. However, foster children do not only lag behind their peers, our second series of meta-analyses showed that, once in foster care, children do not improve their functioning in terms of cognitive, adaptive and behavioral development. There was a large variation between the longitudinal studies included in the meta-analyses with respect to foster children's development. We performed several moderator analyses to examine whether differences in design (study length, sample size, attrition, type of publication) or sample (foster children's mean age) could explain this variation in outcomes. Most of the moderator analyses yielded non-significant findings and thus we could not identify characteristics that were critical for foster children's positive development. By means of our empirical longitudinal study we aimed to get further insight in a variety of foster child, foster family and foster placement characteristics related to the development of children in foster care.

### **Findings from our Empirical Studies**

We found characteristics related to foster children's development, such as positive parenting, foster children receiving interventions, foster parents thinking about quitting foster care, the presence of biological children of foster parents, and the availability of plans for reunification. Although these characteristics partly explained foster children's development and provided useful insights, they could not explain the total variance in foster children's development. An important finding of our empirical longitudinal study is that foster children varied widely in psychosocial functioning: approximately 45% scored within the 'normal' range on the SDQ, 15% within the borderline range, and 40% in the clinical range. This means that there is a large group of foster children that shows a normative development, but also



a sizeable group that shows serious developmental problems. It is both the heterogeneity of developmental trajectories and the lack of an accurate model for foster children's development that lends significance to screening and monitoring of foster children's development. We advise foster care agencies to systematically implement screening and monitoring measures in order to capture foster children's developmental diversity. This enables timely identification of those foster children who experience developmental difficulties and are at risk for negative developmental trajectories and breakdown (Newton et al., 2000; Oosterman et al., 2007).

There is a considerable group of foster children for whom support is clearly needed because they encounter developmental problems while staying in their foster family. In our empirical studies we found that interventions aimed at foster children explained the largest amount of variance in their behavior problems, both internalizing and externalizing. However, the relation between interventions and outcomes was positive, indicating that children who receive interventions have more internalizing and externalizing behaviors than children not receiving interventions. We suggested that interventions might be directed to those who are in highest need of additional support (Burns et al., 2004). However, the positive relation between interventions and behavior problems could also indicate that efforts to support foster children are not timely enough, and are started when problems have 'gotten out of hand'. Again, we would like to stress the importance of systematically screening and monitoring foster children's development to prevent problems from worsening. Although implementing screening and monitoring requires an additional effort from all parties involved, we would contend that it will pay back in the short as well as in the long run. Insight into foster children's developmental trajectories will allow to more timely target support services. It is important to invest time and effort in foster children who are in highest need for it. In the long run screening and monitoring enables to critically reflect upon the effects of policies and practices on foster children's development.

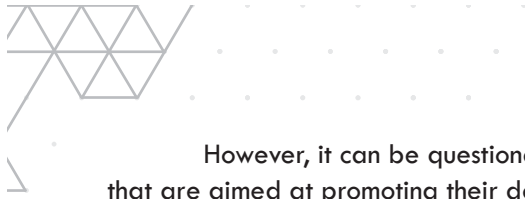
### **Suggestions for Screening and Monitoring**

Currently, screening and monitoring practices in the Netherlands differ between foster care agencies. Some foster care agencies use standardized or self-developed measures, others screen and monitor by means of conversations between the foster care professional and the foster family, and some make a combination of the two. In this study we used the BAC measures for screening and monitoring. Though other screening instruments for foster children exist in the Netherlands (Lekkerkerker et al., 2016; Weterings & Van den Bergh, 2009), no validation studies for these instruments have been published as of yet. With our choice for the BAC measures we follow the recent Dutch guidelines for foster care policy and practice with respect to screening of children who enter foster care and with respect to ongoing monitoring of children during their placement in the foster family (De Baat et al., 2015). These guidelines state that specialized screening measures for foster children are lacking. The BAC measures, for which we described the psychometric properties in this dissertation, might fill this gap. The results of our study suggest that the BAC-C (for children) and BAC-A (for adolescents) perform both screening and monitoring functions well. We encourage the use of validated measures for screening and monitoring, such as the BAC measures, because their psychometric properties are known and it is also known how these measures relate to relevant child outcomes and

family characteristics. Our study showed that BAC scores were highly related to foster parent's stress and foster children's behavior problems. Advantages of the BAC measures are that these measures pose very specific questions related to, for example, attachment behavior, such as 'craves affection' or 'relates to strangers as if they were family'. Filling out the BAC measures leads to a total score which can be meaningfully compared between foster children. However, future research is needed to assess the value of the BAC compared to other measures. It would be of interest to examine whether the BAC identifies a group of children that is not identified by measures such as the SDQ or the CBCL because trauma and attachment behaviors fall outside the 'regular' diagnostic behavior (Dölitzsch, Kölch, Fegert, Schmeck, & Schmid, 2016; Iwaniec, 2006). This might mean that the BAC shows better sensitivity than either the SDQ or the CBCL. Good sensitivity is certainly required, but very high sensitivity is likely to come with a risk of incorrectly identifying children as having psychosocial difficulties while there are actually no problems (i.e., false positives). Considering the existing burden on the service capacity of the mental health system and support services, the consequences of high sensitivity in daily practice might have negative consequences for the true positives in terms of capacity and waiting time to start a more comprehensive assessment. The previous makes a good argument for future research to more extensively study the screening properties of the BAC measures, in order to validate a screening cut-point and to reduce false positives and false negatives. Optimal screening cut-points are related to the screening accuracy of a measure. A screening cut-point refers to a certain score at which foster children who receive a score at or above the cut-point screen positive; indicating that they are likely to have psychosocial difficulties and need further assessment. Examining cut-points would inform what is the best trade-off between sensitivity and specificity (i.e., the quality of identifying true negatives).

### Support for Foster Children

Screening and monitoring resulting in the opportunity to provide timely support for foster children will not be a panacea for all developmental difficulties of foster children. Although there certainly are some promising interventions or interventions that contain promising aspects (Leve et al., 2012; Roberts, Glynn, & Waterman 2016; Ruff, Aguilar, & Clausen, 2016; Yarger, Hoye, & Dozier, 2016), we warn against too much optimism about the effects of interventions for foster children and foster families. A recent Dutch randomized controlled trial studied the effectiveness of Parent Management Training Oregon (PMTO) in foster care and reported that no additive effects of PMTO over and above Care as Usual were found for children's behavior problems (Maaskant et al., 2016). PMTO did reduce foster parents' and foster children's stress and increased warmth in foster mother's parenting. However, the authors note that the clinical significance of these effects are limited, and moreover, a four month follow-up study indicated that these positive effects had disappeared (Maaskant, Van Rooij, Overbeek, Oort, & Hermanns, 2016). There are several overview studies indicating the limited effects of interventions aimed at foster children and foster parents (Benesh & Cui, 2016; Dorsey et al., 2008; Macdonald et al., 2016; Rork & McNeil, 2011; Turner, Macdonald, & Dennis, 2007). It is therefore important to further develop and examine interventions for foster care (Dorsey et al., 2008; Hambrick, Oppenheim-Weller, N'zi, & Taussig, 2016).



However, it can be questioned whether foster children are susceptible to interventions that are aimed at promoting their development. Our longitudinal study showed an absence of bidirectional relations between foster children's developmental functioning and foster parents' stress. In reaction to the absence of bidirectional relations, we discussed whether foster parents can, more generally, make their foster children benefit from the new home environments. Doubt about a positive answer is linked to the so-called 'delimits of parental influence' for certain groups of children, such as adoptive or foster children (O'Connor, 2002). Secure attachment and internal attachment representations of foster children might play a role in this limited susceptibility to parental influences (McWey, 2004; Milan & Pinderhughes, 2000). Adverse childhood experiences increase the risk of insecure attachment with biological caregivers (Bovenschen et al., 2016; Cyr, Euser, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn, 2010; McWey, 2004) and raise the chance of developing insecure attachment strategies. When transferred to new relationships with foster parents, such strategies can prove problematic and alienating (Oosterman, Schuengel, & Dozier, 2012; Stovall-McClough & Dozier, 2004) and prevent foster children to benefit from the supportive, sensitive, and responsive environment that foster families generally offer.

### **Support for Foster Parents**

Given the fact that behavior problems are fairly stable over time and interventions only partly or just for a short time reduce foster children's behavior problems, it seems that we also need to find other ways to support foster children's developmental trajectories and to prevent the risk of placement breakdown. Support for foster parents might be a means toward this end, especially because we found in our study that foster children's behavior problems predict foster parents' stress. Consistent with previous studies (Farmer et al., 2005; Hurlburt et al., 2010; Jones & Morissette, 1999; McCarthy et al., 2003), our study showed that a considerable group of foster parents had above average levels of parental stress. Although we found that foster parents' stress did not have an effect on foster children's internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, we know from previous studies that parental stress can be negatively related to foster parents' motivation to continue fostering (Brown & Bednar, 2006; Farmer et al., 2005) and therefore poses a risk for foster placement breakdown (Van Rooij et al., 2015). Foster care professionals should be alert to foster parents' stress.

Although previous studies have not been consistent with respect to their findings of what is most stressful for foster parents, communication and relationships with the foster care agency and professionals are mentioned as important sources of stress to foster parents (Blackburn, 2016; Van den Bergh, 2013). There are some promising initiatives worth mentioning, because they might be helpful in offering support for foster parents in dealing with difficult child behavior as well as with stress from other sources. One example of such an initiative is a helpline for foster parents. Blackburn (2016) examined the effects of the so-called 'Fosterline' in England, which is a national independent helpline for foster parents, both current and prospective, to obtain confidential advice and support. It was shown that obtaining support by calling this helpline encouraged foster parents' motivation and intentions to continue fostering (Blackburn, 2016). Another initiative to support foster parents is respite care (Madden et al., 2016), which refers to a short-term foster placement, such as part-time foster care, to provide



relief and temporarily relieve for foster parents. Respite care has been shown to decrease the feelings of stress and burden in foster parents (Madden et al., 2016; Owens-Kane, 2007). The option of part-time foster care in a full-time foster care arrangement also exists in the Dutch foster care system. Foster care professionals might want to consider raising awareness of this option and thereby increasing the access to formal respite care in order to reduce stress levels of foster parents and promote placement stability and foster children's well-being (Madden et al., 2016).

## Limitations and Directions for Future Research

### Drawbacks of Meta-Analysis

We reported the advantages of meta-analyses in our general introduction, but it should be noted that meta-analyses also have several drawbacks (Flather, Farkouh, Pogue, & Yusuf, 1997; Ioannidis & Lau, 1999; Spector & Thompson, 1991). The first series of meta-analyses compared groups of children in different living arrangements (Chapter 2). However, this comparison could not deal with the evidently unavoidable preexisting differences between children in particular living arrangements. Previous studies did not use a randomized controlled trial, did not perfectly match their compared groups, did not always control for differences between groups, and were not fully able to disentangle the effects of being in care versus the effects of pre-existing differences such as experienced abuse or neglect. Because the quality of meta-analysis is dependent on the strengths and weaknesses of the included studies, the comparability between groups is also a limitation of our meta-analysis. However, this should not withhold researchers from the important task to find support for decision making models in child welfare. A recent longitudinal study by Biehal, Baldwin, Cusworth, and Wade (2016) on the outcomes of children who had contact with social workers and who had either been supported in their own homes or were placed in a foster family, provides an example of a research design that deals well with this challenge. Their study analyzed and reported several pre-existing differences between the groups to achieve the goal of providing important new insights on the role of the care system in mediating children's experienced adversities.

The second series of meta-analyses, which examined the longitudinal development of children in foster care (Chapter 3), presented an overall picture of no improvement or deterioration with respect to foster children's development. We tried to get insight in the conditions or characteristics that are related to the overall effect, whereby we particularly focused on study characteristics, and not so much on foster care specific characteristics, such as placement history or length of stay in the foster family. It might be that foster care specific characteristics are related to foster children's development. However, we could not analyze the role of these characteristics, because the foster care specific characteristics were not systematically reported for the studies included in our meta-analyses. Meta-analysis certainly has many advantages, however, it cannot answer all relevant questions and sometimes lacks specificity to actually come to the crux of the matter.



### **Importance of Multiple Informants**

A limitation of our empirical study is that we only included foster parents as informant. In this respect our study is not different from many other studies on foster care. The majority of the studies included in our meta-analyses also made use of only one informant. There are several reasons to use multiple informants in future research, such as the prevention of same method variance (Brannick, Chan, Conway, Lance, & Spector, 2010), or to obtain different perspectives. Using a single-informant approach neglects the perspectives of foster children and other important figures such as biological parents, foster care professionals and teachers. From previous research it is known that different informants may report differently on foster children's behavioral functioning (Boada, 2007; Shore, Sim, Le Prohn, & Keller, 2002). Foster parents do not always report in a way and intensity that is similar to reports of foster children themselves, or their teachers (McAuley & Trew, 2000; Strijker, Van Oijen, & Knot-Dickscheit, 2011). For example foster parents have been shown to report more behavior problems than teachers (McAuley & Trew, 2000). On the other hand, it is also suggested that teachers are less sensitive to internalizing behaviors than to externalizing behaviors (Dubowitz et al., 1993; Tarren-Sweeney, Hazell, & Carr, 2004). Because of these discrepancies between informants it is recommended to include multiple perspectives to get a broader understanding of foster care and foster children's development (Boada, 2007).

This topic of multiple informants relates to the broader discussion on the significance of multiple informants for the assessment of the mental health of children and adolescents in general (De Los Reyes et al., 2015; Kaurin, Egloff, Stringaris, & Wessa, 2016). In classical theories of psychological measurement it is assumed that only convergence, or agreement, between different informants would give a reliable estimate of the psychosocial functioning of children. However, the use of multiple informants is not necessarily a means to find the 'truth' or to reach convergence, or agreement, between informants. Different perspectives indicate discriminant validity and should be considered as meaningful (Kaurin et al., 2016) for example with respect to tailoring treatment or service needs (De Los Reyes et al., 2015). In foster care this means that the perspectives of foster children, biological parents, foster parents, teachers and foster care professionals are all important. Actually, the need to include the views of foster children in research and practice increasingly received attention over the past years (Johnson et al., 1995; Messing, 2006; Sands, Goldberg-Glen, & Shin, 2009; Unrau, 2007; Warming, 2006; Whiting & Lee, 2003). In the Dutch foster care practice a good example for including multiple perspectives is the previously mentioned 'Monitor foster care' (Lekkerkerker et al., 2016). In this Monitor, ideally the foster child, biological parents, foster parents, and child welfare professionals are involved in the evaluation of the foster placement.

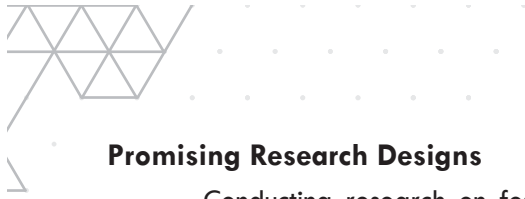
### **Careful Consideration of Measures**

For our empirical studies we collected most data online. The use of online questionnaires has been extensively discussed in terms of its advantages and disadvantages (e.g., Evans & Mathur, 2005; Heiervang & Goodman, 2011; Lefever, Dal, & Matthiasdottir, 2007). Online data-collection is a cost-effective and efficient way to organize data-collection. However, lower response rates and selection bias might be a problem. Heiervang and Goodman (2011) compared interviews and online questionnaires to assess children's mental health. Although

## General Discussion

they demonstrated that the use of an online questionnaire resulted in a biased sample reporting lower estimates of psychopathology, the relations between children's mental health and risk factors was the same as for the interviews. It is important to keep their findings in mind because our study was characterized by a considerable amount of non-response. However, our study design, and both ethical and practical constraints only allowed us to make use of online questionnaires, even though the use of observations, interviews and other measures would have given valuable information as well. For example, with respect to the measurement of the foster family and the caregiving environment we used the APQ, the NOSI-K and several demographic questions related to socioeconomic status and family household. These measures give an indication of the quality of the home environment of the child, but there are observation and interview measures which would have resulted in a richer picture.

Furthermore, specific methods to capture the dynamic nature of potential transactional relations might facilitate a better understanding foster children's development from a transactional perspective (Sameroff, 2009). We examined the transactional relations between foster children's psychosocial development and foster parents' stress. We did not find support for bidirectional relations between foster parents and foster children, but future research should develop a better understanding of parent-child interactions. This may be achieved by applying a dynamic systems approach (Granic & Hollenstein, 2003; Van Geert & Steenbeek, 2005). In order to quantify the observational data 'state space grids' (SSG) can be used (Lewis, Lamey, & Douglas, 1999). With this method, the sequence of behavioral states of, in this case, foster parents and foster children is plotted as it proceeds in real time on a grid representing all possible behavioral combinations of the dyad (Granic & Hollenstein, 2003; Hollenstein et al., 2004). This will provide more detailed information on the interactions between the foster child and its environment. Another method which may provide insight in the developmental processes and dynamic systems of foster children and foster care is time series analysis (Hamaker, Grasman, & Kamphuis, 2016). The advantage of time series analysis is that it enables to study the data from small numbers of foster children and still get insight in processes relevant to their development (Hamaker et al., 2016). Latent growth curve modeling could be applied as a statistical technique to analyze the data. Latent growth curve modeling enables to estimate the inter-individual variability in intra-individual patterns of change (or development) over time (Curran, Obeidat, & Losardo, 2010), i.e.; differences between foster children in individual developmental trajectories. This approach is increasingly applied in studies, also in foster care (Fisher & Kim, 2007; McWey, Cui, & Pazdera, 2010; Chamberlain, Leve, & DeGarmo, 2007; Proctor, Skinner, Roesch, & Litrownik, 2010). In the current dissertation, we applied this approach in Chapter 6 where we examined foster children's school engagement. This is a starting point, but future research should try to also consider the psychosocial development of foster children using a latent growth curve model.



### Promising Research Designs

Conducting research on foster children can be challenging (Jackson et al., 2012; Maaskant, 2016). When setting up new studies on foster children, researchers should preferably learn and draw inspiration from past studies and carefully consider their research designs (NSCAW Research Group, 2002). As discussed in this dissertation, previous (longitudinal) studies on foster children often included small sample sizes, making it difficult to test complex models and find robust effects. There are, however, some examples of large national studies on children (also foster children) in child welfare. Examples are studies such as the NSCAW, the representative longitudinal survey of American children and families who have been the subject of investigation by Child Protective Services, the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS), a large-scale prospective longitudinal study of children and young people in out-of-home care in Australia, and the Canadian Incidence Study (CIS), a national initiative to collect data on children who come to the attention of child welfare due to suspected abuse or neglect. Combining research efforts and strengths to perform a national study in the Netherlands would create many opportunities to generate a rich database that would allow for important advances in the development and validation of knowledge on foster care.

We realize that building large national studies is a major step. In the meantime, Trocmé, Roy, and Esposito (2016) give some helpful suggestions for starting to build research capacity in child welfare settings that would be required for a large national study, but could also provide a starting point for collaboration between foster care professionals and researchers on smaller studies. Trocmé et al. (2016) describe that there is little research on the efficacy of child welfare services in Canada. Child welfare agencies do not always have a strong research culture and their research capacity is sometimes limited. This may be resolved by collaboration between researchers and child welfare professionals in participatory research projects. This would be an important step toward building research capacity (Trocmé et al., 2016). It would likely be experienced as an asset if the university's research infrastructure would be placed at the service of community agencies. By doing so, firm research partnerships could be formed wherein researchers have access for research in child welfare settings and child welfare agencies can make better use of research findings which are adapted to and get significance in particular child welfare practices. Moreover, welfare professionals could be trained to become practitioner researchers. Another suggestion to perform research is to make use of administrative child welfare data (Green et al., 2015; Huffhines et al., 2016; Kum, Stewart, Rose, & Duncan, 2015; Lery, Haight, & Alpert, 2016). Administrative records can provide supplementary information or an additional perspective on foster children's development. Although Green et al. (2015) point at the potential limitations of using administrative records, such as underreporting, privacy concerns and concerns with confidentiality and reliability of the information provided by the records, they stress that the benefits can outweigh the challenges. They provide an overview of the lessons learned and make several recommendations, such as ensuring adequate time and resources to establish agreements with child welfare agencies and how to deal with the variability in child welfare system processes in order to ensure comparability within and between agencies. In order to make the most of administrative records, child welfare agencies are encouraged to continue to improve their record keeping (Green et al., 2015).

## General Conclusion

Foster children greatly vary with respect to their developmental functioning. This dissertation provides an overview of the foster children's development and the characteristics related to their development. We have learned that foster children on average have lower levels of adaptive, behavioral and cognitive functioning compared to children from the general population. Furthermore, foster children on average do not improve in functioning during their stay in the foster family. Nevertheless, although foster children are often characterized as having developmental problems, approximately 45% of the foster children in our sample fare generally well while in foster care. However, we also need to stress that approximately 40% of the foster children have clinical levels of behavior problems. These behavior problems may affect foster parents' stress and although we did not find support for bidirectional relations between foster parents' stress and foster children's behavior problems, increased parental stress in itself is concerning because of the risk of foster placement breakdown (Van Rooij et al., 2015) and the risk of jeopardizing the well-being of foster parents and foster children. Given the large heterogeneity of foster children's developmental trajectories and the absence of accurate models that can fully predict how foster children will develop, we advise foster care agencies to systematically implement screening and monitoring measures in order to capture foster children's developmental diversity. This enables to timely identify those foster children at risk for negative developmental trajectories and breakdown. Researchers and foster care professionals should establish collaborations in order to improve the validity as well as the feasibility of screening and monitoring children in foster care. Working with an online system would be helpful in the organization of systematic screening and monitoring. In case of new foster placements, foster parents could be invited at the start of the placement and then again at regular intervals to complete standardized measures such as the BAC measures and the SDQ. Through the use of new technologies screening and monitoring can be organized in such a way that standardized scoring is done instantaneously and the findings are directly made available to foster care professionals and automatically stored in the client's files. Such standardized, automated procedures could inform professionals' guidance and support for foster families and children. Although implementing systematic screening and monitoring requires an additional effort from all parties involved, we think that it will pay back because it enables to focus time and money on those foster children and foster families that really need the extra support and attention.

