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# Evaluation of Family Reunification after Foster Care in the State of Minas Gerais - Brazil

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*Abstract— Family foster care is intended for the care of children and adolescents who are away from the family by judicial protective measure, emerged as an innovative reception strategy, providing individual and personalized care to children or adolescents who are victims of some form of violence. The present study aimed to brief analyse data from the most recent SUAS census in Brazil, focusing on one of the states of the federation to verify how the referrals of children and adolescents who go through foster care are being carried out. The data showed that in certain places there is discrepancy in reintegration and adoption, the latter being the most common. More effective actions to prepare the families of origin for reunification must be carried out.*

*Keywords— Family foster, Children, Adolescents, Reunification, Adoption*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Violence against children and adolescents is a serious global social problem present in developed and developing countries. It is characterized as a public health issue, given the impact and consequences on scope of individual and collective health, constituting, therefore, a relevant theme. The complexity of the phenomenon, which is usually treated in a veiled way by both aggressors as victims, justifies and demands the involvement of professionals who serve this clientele to notify the cases, especially due to the relevance regarding the dimension of the problem, the priorities for the care of the victims in the different populations and the definition of planning and implementation of policies and strategic prevention and intervention programs [1].

In Brazil the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS) establishes, in the Special Social Protection Services, security for populations in situations of personal and social risk. Welcoming is a highly complex and transitory service, where people victims of violence and whose rights are violated or threatened are welcomed with comprehensive care, rights are violated or threatened in cases of abandonment, mistreatment, negligence, breakage or momentary suspension of family and community ties. The aim is to provide full protection to individuals at risk, ensure their rights, restore family and community links and references, and promote social inclusion [2].

Most care institutions, when faced with the need to maintain collective order, end up adopting the practice of rules and discipline, and they are not always able to provide an environment integrative, capable of promoting a welcome that manages to minimize suffering, as the sheltered child and adolescent really needs, and may even disrupt their preparation process for family reunification [3].

Family foster care is intended for the care of children and adolescents who are away from the family by judicial protective measure, emerged as an innovative reception strategy, providing individual and personalized care to children or adolescents who are victims of some form of violence. They begin to live temporarily with a welcoming family, previously selected and trained by a technical team, to take care of them until the judicial authority issues a sentence regarding their return to the family of origin, if the situation that violates the law is overcome, or placement in a surrogate family through adoption [4].

Foster families in Brazil are volunteers and are not candidates for adoption. In this sense, the foster family has the objective of guaranteeing a more individualized family life, based on the provision of care aligned with the affective, psychological and social needs of the sheltered person. The family acts as a partner in full protection, giving up their living space and temporarily becoming the legal guardian of the host. In this way, it undertakes to respect the individualities and cultural beliefs of each one, as well as collaborate in the reconstruction of personal and social bonds, when possible [5].

It is important to mention art. 101, first paragraph of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA) [6] of Brazil when stating that institutional care and foster care are provisional and exceptional measures, usable as a

form of transition to family reunification or, if this is not possible, for placement in surrogate family. Thus, it is clear that family reintegration is a priority and that only when you have exhausted all attempts to restructure the family of origin should adoption become an option. Not only in Brazil, but globally, the trend is to seek to reunite minors away from the family. Child welfare systems prioritize reunification with parents over other permanency outcomes because of policies that require them to make all reasonable efforts to intervene to address the reason for removal so that the family can be reunified [7]. In this context, the present study aimed to brief analyse data from the most recent SUAS census, focusing on one of the states of the federation, Minas Gerais, to verify how the referrals of children and adolescents who go through foster care are being carried out.

## II. METHODS

This is a retrospective quantitative documental study in which information was collected from the 2022 SUAS Census database on foster care.

The SUAS Census aims to collect information on the standards of services, programs and assistance projects carried out within the scope of public social assistance units and entities and organizations included in the registration of social assistance, as well as on the performance of the Social Assistance Councils, as provided for in Decree 7,334, of October 19, 2010. The electronic questionnaire of the executing Units of the Host Families Service can be completed by municipalities and states from October 3 to December 9, 2022. Information was collected on all units that offer Family Sheltering Services linked to the municipality social assistance policy, including entities that do not have an agreement with the government public, but act in the field of social assistance [2].

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In situations of violence, in its most varied forms, children and adolescents who become victims must be removed from their original environment, in general, their own home and family members. However, as recommended in Brazil, the first option is to carry out social and psychological work with the family of origin for a possible return in safe conditions for the minor. The search for a substitute family should only occur after all attempts to return have been exhausted. Thus, adoption should not be seen as the first option in this context.

Taking advantage of the fact that this year there was a change in the management of the family care service in Araxá, Minas Gerais, it is hoped that the analysis of the most recent census data can lead to improvements in the service in favour of the best interest of the children and adolescents in the municipality.

In table 1, it is possible to verify that the main cities that offer foster care in the state of Minas Gerais provided different directions for children and adolescents in the last year analysed by the Census, highlighting that Belo Horizonte, which is the state capital, and Uberlândia, the second most populous city in the state, were the ones that returned the most to the biological mother and/or father, which indicates a social and psychological work that is more adequate to what is foreseen in the high social complexity. On the other hand, the cities of Ituiutaba and Araxá had very high percentages in terms of adoption, and it is worth mentioning that the latter sent 12, the highest rate in the state. Still regarding this analysis, figure 1, by listing the five main cities in the state with directions, reinforces the large number of adoptions noted in the period for Araxá.

TABLE I  
FORWARDING OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN MUNICIPALITIES OF MINAS GERAIS THAT HIGHLIGHTED IN FOST CARE

City**	Population***	Foster at the time of research	Foster newcomers in the last 12 months	Forwarding in the last 12 months*					
				Return to mother and/or father		Return to other members of the family		Adoptive family	
				N	%	N	%	N	%
Belo Horizonte	2,530,701	37	24	13	44.82	9	31.03	7	24.13
Uberlândia	706,597	45	69	7	41.17	4	23.52	6	35.29
Juiz de Fora	577,532	4	11	0	0	3	50	3	50
Betim	450,024	8	10	3	30	0	0	7	70
Montes Claros	417,478	3	11	1	20	0	0	4	80
Divinópolis	242,505	9	17	3	21.42	7	50	4	28.57
Passos	115,970	6	10	0	0	3	75	1	25
Araxá	108,403	10	19	5	27.77	1	5.55	12	66.66
Ituiutaba	105,818	13	11	0	0	0	0	2	100
Bueno Brandão	10,982	2	10	5	71.42	2	28.57	0	0
Novo Oriente de Minas	108,000	4	10	1	16.66	4	66.66	1	16.66

\*Percentage calculated considering the total number of forwarding that occurred in the period.

\*\* Cities in Minas Gerais with the most welcome newcomers in the last year.

\*\*\* IBGE estimate. Available: <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/mg>

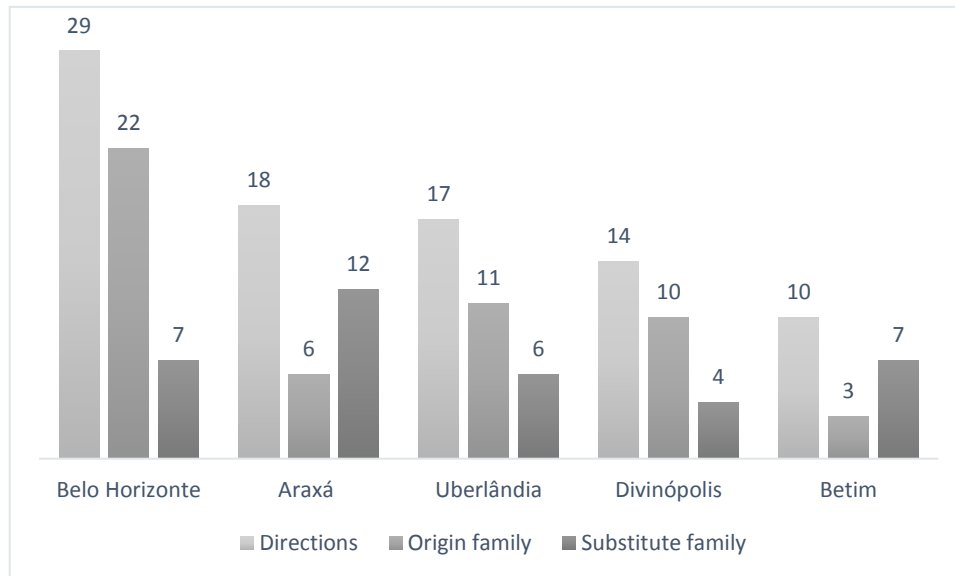


Fig. 1 Number of directions of children/adolescents who returned to their family of origin and who went to adoptive families, for the five cities that performed the most referrals in the period evaluated, according to the SUAS Census (2022).

As it is possible to observe in figure 2, in general, there are no significant differences regarding the directions given when comparing Brazil as a whole and the state of Minas Gerais, with the return to the family of origin being approximately 63% and 69% for Brazil and Minas Gerais, respectively. Adoptions were about 37% and 31% for the country and for the state.

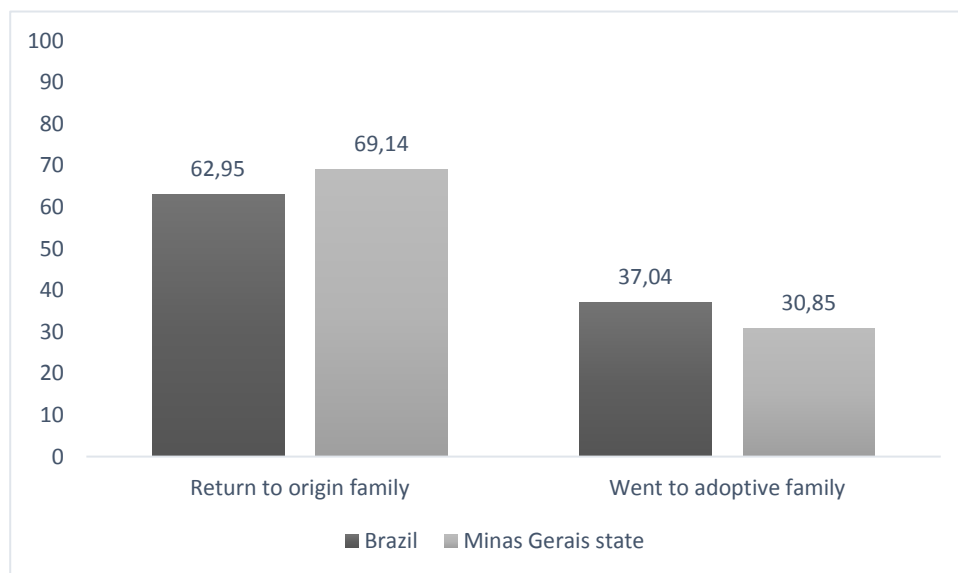


Fig. 2 Percentages of referrals to the family of origin and to the surrogate family in Brazil and in the state of Minas Gerais according to the SUAS Census (2022).

Another Brazilian study also evaluated referrals after foster care, using a traditional foster care service as a field of study, with 314 foster cares between 1998 and 2007, with 33.8% of children returned for origin family and 34.2% adopted families during the period evaluated [8]. The percentages obtained were similar to those shown here for Brazil as a whole and also for the state of Minas Gerais, however, they are quite different from data from some foster care services in some municipalities mentioned above. Still in the study carried out by the cited authors, it was highlighted que during reception, the program should provide follow-up of the child, the

family of origin and the host family, so that existing problems are discussed and solved, allowing the return of the child to the home of origin and ensuring their well-being to the fullest. The authors also warned that the top priority of foster care is reintegration into the family of origin and that they consider the success rate obtained for this direction to be below what is desirable.

To assess the correct applicability of the rights of children and adolescents to minors sheltered in the Pinhalzinho region, which includes the municipalities of Pinhalzinho, Nova Erechim and Saudades, state of Santa Catarina, Brazil, another study was controlled [9]. In the last 5 years, 35 (thirty-five) children were welcomed in the municipality of Pinhalzinho, of which 33 (thirty-three) returned to their biological families and two were up for adoption. In the study, it is quite clear that this success in preparing the biological families for the reintegration of the child is due to hard and intense teamwork, with the effective participation of the entire social assistance network in the municipality and partnership with the Judiciary and the Council Guardianship.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The reception of children and adolescents victims of negligence and abuse must be carried out in a humane way and following the guidelines of the types of reception, whether institutional or family, which are defined as a priority by the Statute of the Child and Adolescent in Brazil, with clear indication of family reunification should be the first option. Only when exhaustive attempts at reunification fail should adoption be defended. However, in a country like Brazil, with continental dimensions, not all states and municipalities with family care services are able to meet this premise. The data showed that in certain places there is discrepancy in reunification and adoption, the latter being the most common. Thus, actions and public policies need to be better directed to comply with current legislation and guarantee the best possible destination for children and adolescents who needed to be removed from their family nucleus.

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