

# **Ang Pag-Aruga sa Di Tunay na Kanila: Factors Affecting Foster Carers to Foster Care a Child**

**WILLIAM JO SE M. BILLOTE**

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4762-7551>

[williamjosebillote@gmail.com](mailto:williamjosebillote@gmail.com)

Batanes State College

Basco, Batanes, Philippines

Colegio de Dagupan

Dagupan City, Pangasinan, Philippines

Saint Dominic College of Batanes Inc.

Basco, Batanes, Philippines

**GERICKA MAE M. DIZON**

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5970-4342>

[gerickadizon@gmail.com](mailto:gerickadizon@gmail.com)

Colegio de Dagupan

Dagupan City, Pangasinan, Philippines

**JARRAH KAY S. FERNANDEZ**

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6029-7841>

[kayeaiya@gmail.com](mailto:kayeaiya@gmail.com)

Colegio de Dagupan

Dagupan City, Pangasinan, Philippines

**RHOSE ANN A. NARVASA**

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3465-665X>

[rhoseannnarvasa@gmail.com](mailto:rhoseannnarvasa@gmail.com)

Colegio de Dagupan

Dagupan City, Pangasinan, Philippines

Teleperformance

Makati City, Metro Manila, Philippines

**HANNAH Q. VIERNES**

http://orcid.org 0000-0003-1755-7107

vierneshannah97@gmail.com

Ace Hardware Philippines, Inc.

Urdaneta City, Pangasinan, Philippines

Colegio de Dagupan

Dagupan City, Pangasinan, Philippines

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**ABSTRACT**

If parents are unable, unwilling, or unfit to take good care of a child, the child might be better in a new home environment. An alternative way called foster caring, which is given by foster carers, would likely to take place. In this regard, the study determined the factors affecting foster carers to foster care a child and identified the more prevalent factors. The study considered both formal and informal foster care systems. The study was quantitative and employed a descriptive design. The researchers went to Baguio City, La Union, and Pangasinan to gather data, but only eight respondents from Pangasinan participated in the study. Inventory questionnaires were utilized wherein Mean Analysis and Analysis of Variance were used in the analysis and interpretation of data. All the factors namely Altruism, Companionship for One's Child, Life Dissatisfaction, Desire to Derive Income, Desire to Nurture a Child, Identification with Deprived Children and Need to be Needed affect foster carers to foster care a child. However, there were only four prevalent factors which are Altruism, Life Dissatisfaction, and Desire to Nurture a Child, and Need to be needed. In conclusion, the factors which affect foster carers to foster care a child play a significant role in the child's welfare and development.

**Keywords** — Psychology, factors, foster carers, foster child, foster care, descriptive design, Baguio City, La Union, Pangasinan, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

According to Enrique, Howk, & Huitt (2007), a family is said to be the primary source of support, nurturance, and protection of children. It is considered to be the foundation of children's future. Specifically, parents have the task of shaping and guiding the steps of every child to succeed in all facets of life. Although having children presents massive challenges, it cannot be denied that it is still one of the happiest milestones in life. However, as evident, there is no perfect household. Struggles are inevitable, and at some point, the things mentioned in the outset could no longer be sustained, which can be detrimental to children. The parents might feel swamped by complications of life. Therefore, they cannot handle their household anymore and worse, could be brought to ruin.

Since children are considered as vulnerable individuals, they can easily get affected by the things around them that is why a measure of love and support is much needed. It is in this case that children who are experiencing neglect from their biological parents in their social, emotional and medical aspects of life and are suffering from physical abuse are candidates for entering the alternative care which is the foster care system (Scott, O'Neill, & Minge, 2005). In the aforementioned cases, foster carers could intercede. Interestingly, this group of people is very willing to expend themselves for the sake of these children. In addition, there are two kinds of foster care. These are (a) formal foster care and (b) informal foster care. Formal foster care is a system wherein legal court's decisions take place while informal foster care is when biological parents entrust their children to another party, and there are no judicial processes (Faith to Action Initiative, n.d.).

Foster care is an international issue. Based on the reports collated by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division (2009), the United Nations Population Division estimates that at least 260,000 children were adopted annually around 2005 at the global level. A large number of adoptions also takes place in China (almost 46,000 in 2001) and the Russian Federation (more than 23,000 in 2001). Other countries with sizeable numbers of adoptions are Germany, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom, each with over 5,000 adoptions annually. Brazil, Canada, France, and Spain also recorded significant numbers, ranging from 4,000 to 5,000 adoptions per year. As of September 30, 2016, 437,465 children in the United States are in foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017).

Moreover, South Asia has millions of children who have no families already. In an estimated number of 652 million children living, there are 41 million orphans. In India, the Juvenile Justice Bill or Care and Protection for Children was implemented last August 2014 by the Minister of Women and Child Development Maneka Gandhi wherein it discussed the formal promotion of foster and the introduction of de-institutionalization of children. Also, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have programs about the foster care system. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) had a project of establishing a foster care program for children who are neglected wherein over 2,000 families joined. Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, 18, 000 children were already helped by the Government Sevana Sarana Foster Parents Scheme, which was established since 1988 (Jain, 2015). Lastly, in the Philippines, the Foster Care Act of 2012, also known as Republic Act No. 10165, which aims to strengthen and propagate foster care and to provide funds, was approved and implemented by Benigno S. Aquino III last June 11, 2012 (The LAWPHiL Project, n.d.).

The researchers were encouraged to conduct this study due to the following reasons: First, to explore how the motivation of couples and individuals to foster care a child based on their life stories affects their parenting abilities and second, because of the increasing trend of foster care around the world, to determine if there is something deeper behind every motivation or factor to foster care a child. Conducting this research will further broaden current literature regarding this topic on the motivations and experiences that affect foster carers to foster care a child.

## FRAMEWORK

### Factors Why Foster Carers Consider Foster Caring a Child

Each foster carer has his or her reasons for considering foster care. Every choice to foster care is unique. Every couple or individual has walked a different path in arriving at their decision. However, there are some common themes when it comes to foster caring. The following are the common factors why people choose to foster care a child:

**Altruism.** Altruism refers to the selfless behavior of an individual wherein he or she is doing something for the sake of others without expecting anything in return. In foster care, some of the individuals are helping children to overcome their past. Even though some are questioning altruistic actions, individuals who

are willing to support the foster care program are opening the doors for the child to have a new family (Peake & Townsend, 2012).

According to Fenton (2016), foster carers expressed altruistic motivations as a factor in their decision to foster care a child. Because of this, several foster carers consider foster caring “a chance to do something good.” Several calls it a “win-win,” even a “win-win-win” situation explaining that foster carers “won” by growing their family, their adopted children “won” by being spared life in an institution, and the world would “win,” through one “small act of healing” at a time.

**Companionship for One’s Child.** Foster care programs are temporary placement programs to allow the child to have a family. Aside from this, families who only have one child consider foster caring so that someone can accompany their child. These children may enjoy their own company, but there will be times when they will feel alone. They long to have someone that they could share a close and intimate relationship.

Moreover, sibling relationships are amongst the most significant and potentially important bonds that individuals have in the course of their lifetime. Usually formed in childhood, they tend to last longer than other key relationships, such as those with parents and partners and, ordinarily, children will spend more time in interactions with siblings than with close others (Dunn, 2007). As well as existing through blood ties, siblingship can be formed in other ways, such as legally through adoption or through familial affinities, such as foster care. Through foster care programs, they could help both the foster child and the biological child.

**Life Dissatisfaction.** Foster caring an individual can be driven by loneliness. For a woman, the ability to bear her child is one of life’s greatest achievements. However, some women may experience difficulty bearing their own. Infertility is not hopeless, even when it may feel that way. It is not a fault of anyone, and it does not have to be a hindrance to the expansion of any family either, but it is undeniably difficult.

The effects of infertility can be emotionally stressful for couples. They are often left in a state of shock and heartbreak, especially when they experience emotions such as frustration and shame. Fortunately, they do not have to endure the thought of not ever having and building a family of their own.

Today, when couples or individuals are unable to have children due to infertility, there are other options they can explore to start a family—namely, foster care. As stated, foster care is a great next step for many couples who

cannot have children themselves. This is the number one option that families are struggling with infertility turn. Overall, infertility to foster care looks like hope for many individuals and families. Foster care allows people the change and experience of raising a child, having a family, and impacting a child's life forever (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Foster care programs offer temporary placement program, and through this, the individuals will be given a chance to build a sense of family.

**Desire to Derive Income.** While many dedicated people willing to open their homes and hearts to children in distress, it cannot be denied that financial gain is among a number of significant incentives leading some to become foster parents (Thoma, 2003). In foster caring a child, one of the incentives that agencies may provide is a monthly subsidy to support the needs of the foster child and also to help foster carers with the expenses during the placement program.

Researchers about foster subsidy program have found that subsidies are correlated with increased adoption rates (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1993; Hansen, 2005, as cited in Buckles, 2013).

In the United States, each state determines its level of monthly adoption assistance subsidy support. States are partially reimbursed through federal appropriations. Federal reimbursement of an adoption assistance subsidy is capped at the amount that would be reimbursed if the child remained in foster care (Hansen, 2005). This becomes a motivation for individuals to foster care because they think that foster caring provides them with an income. But it is important to understand that a foster carer cannot consider this as income. The money is a subsidy, not intended as income. Foster parents are not employees of the foster care agency that licenses their home, nor are they employees of the state. They do not technically provide services to the state; they provide services in the form of care to the children they take in. A foster care subsidy is intended to pay for the foster child's needs, and sometimes, it is barely enough to cover those needs.

**Desire to Nurture a Child.** Most of the foster carers want to foster care a child because they do not have a child of their own. Foster caring is not just for married couples but also for single individuals who enjoy having a child at home. In addition, their application as foster carers can also be their way to adopt a child possibly.

These individuals are ready to become parents, but their situation hinders them from being one. They have the right job to provide the needs of a family, and for most of them, they want to seize the opportunity while they are still

young to care for a child. Because of this, they decide to make foster care plans. Although they are ready to bring and raise children in their lives, they are aware that it will bring forth challenges and hardships.

However, their desire to parent arises from a wish to meet a child's needs and enjoy a relationship with him or her. Hence, foster care has a greater chance of a positive outcome.

**Identification with Deprived Children.** Personal experience also plays a role in why individuals choose to foster care for a child. One may already experience being abused or neglected as a child, or some may have been in the same foster care program. Individuals who have been in the same situation and can cope with it may want to build a new family (Peake & Townsend, 2012).

It is not at all uncommon for people who have experienced foster care to have a foster child later in life eventually. They are living proof of the opportunity that foster care can provide and, knowing that there is no difference between a biological and foster parent's love, they decide to give a child the same positive experience that they had.

**Need to be Needed.** The need to be needed starts when an individual has done something beyond him/her and has made a contribution to the community. When this happens, an individual feels a sense of significance. More than just being accepted by the community, individuals desire to be appreciated and wanted. They want to feel that they are important. According to Maslow, as cited in the study by Jerome (2013), people have a need for a stable, firmly based, high level of respect from others. When this need is satisfied, they feel confident about themselves and valuable in the world. When this need is frustrated, people tend to feel inferior, weak, helpless and worthless because they find themselves beginning to contribute nothing to the community.

As social beings, individuals desire for recognition, acknowledgment, and special status in the eyes of other people. This is why individuals apply to foster care programs because they want to feel wanted. The foster children will depend on them during the placement program. Individuals want to feel significant in the eyes of others, even if it is only one other person. They want to feel like they play an important role, whether in an organization, family, or life of another. Therefore, the personal issue of the foster carer regarding this factor can be fixed by the foster child.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to understand the factors affecting foster carers to foster a child. Further, the study aimed to identify the more prevalent factors that affect the foster carers to foster a child. Moreover, the researchers opted to conduct this study to empower foster carers by increasing their awareness regarding the foster care systems and the factors that affect them in engaging to foster care.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a descriptive design which aimed to describe the factors affecting foster carers to foster care for a child in Baguio City, La Union, and Pangasinan. Inventory questionnaires were utilized to gather data. Hence, treatment and analysis of the data gathered were accomplished using Mean Analysis and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

### Research Site

The study was conducted with the foster carers of children who undergo formal and informal foster care systems. The locale of this study was selected from different agencies and institutions within Baguio City, La Union, and Pangasinan. However, only eight (8) respondents from Pangasinan participated in the study. Three (3) respondents from the formal foster care system were obtained from Caring for the Future Foundation (CFF) while five (5) respondents from the informal foster care system were obtained in different places in Pangasinan.

### Participants

The sample for the study comprises a total of eight (8) primary caregivers who were recruited through purposive sampling and snowballing sampling technique. The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 56. Of the eight (8) participants, five (5) are single, and three (3) are married. Under religion, there are five (5) Roman Catholic, two (2) Born Again and one (1) Jehovah's Witness. Five (5) dwell in rural places and three (3) in urban places. Respondents' educational attainment shows that five (5) are college graduates, while three (3) are college undergraduates. Regarding the respondents' occupation, three (3) fall under housewife, two (2) house parent, one (1) social worker, and two (2) business

person. Based on the survey, the eight (8) participants have an average monthly income of Php 9,990.00 – Php 29,990.00.

### **Instrumentation**

The data gathering tool is a 3-page survey questionnaire that has three (3) parts which included the consent form, personal information, and questionnaire on factors.

### **Consent Form**

The first section of the data gathering tool was attached on the front page of the questionnaire. It provided a background of the researchers, the purpose of their study, and the respondent's permission to voluntarily participate in the study. It also explained the significance of the results of the study to their lives and the lives of foster children. The foster carers were given a copy which was signed to prove that they agreed to participate in the study.

### **Demographic Data**

The second section of the data gathering tool was used to gather information about foster carers such as age, marital status, religion, dwelling, educational attainment, occupation, and monthly income.

### **Questionnaire on Factors**

The questionnaire on factors is a 28-item self-report that measures the factors affecting foster carers to foster care for a child. The questionnaire on factors was constructed by the researchers and was content-validated by co-raters specializing in Psychology, Family and Child Development, and Social Work. Items in the survey were categorized into seven (7) categories namely, Altruism, Companionship for One's Child, Life Dissatisfaction, Desire to Nurture a Child, Desire to Derive Income, Identification with Deprived Children, and Need to be Needed. Filipino translations were also provided for the items in the tool. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient is equal to 0.87, which shows high internal consistency.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The factors that affect the foster carers to foster care a child are Altruism ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.2813), which always affects the foster carers to foster care a child. Then, Life

Dissatisfaction ( $\bar{x} = 3.2500$ ), Desire to Nurture a Child ( $\bar{x} = 3.1250$ ), Needed to be Needed ( $\bar{x} = 2.6563$ ), and Identification with Deprived Children ( $\bar{x} = 2.5625$ ) are often affects the foster carers. Lastly, Companionship ( $\bar{x} = 2.3750$ ), and Desire to Derive Income ( $\bar{x} = 2.1250$ ), seldom affects in foster caring a child. Based on the Pairwise Comparison, the prevalent factors that affect the foster carers to foster care a child are Altruism, Life Dissatisfaction, Desire to Nurture a Child and Needed to be Needed,  $F(6, 368) = 4.90, p < 0.05, (\omega_p^2 = 0.3233)$ .

Based on the findings, Altruism is the main compelling factor why foster carers choose to foster care for a child. The foster carers who participated in the study mentioned that they wanted to help those children in need. This is supported by Sebba (2012) wherein the main driving factor for foster carers to foster care a child is out of their altruistic spirit. Thus, they want to make a difference in the lives of children. In a study by Chowdhury & Mitra (2015), altruistic behavior is an intentional and voluntary action that benefit others being without obtaining any potential self-interest and self-benefit. It is the manifestation of caring, selfless, and non-contingent upon reward, and it is true selflessness with no expectation in any advantage. This motivation or desire can be seen to influence the decision to foster care among individuals (Costa & Tasker, 2018).

It can be surmised that for some foster carers, the motivation driving the decision to pursue foster care may be child-centered. This can be supported by the study conducted by Tyebjee (2003), finding out that 94% of foster carers decided to pursue foster caring a child because they wanted to make a difference to a child's life, 92% considered that children would greatly benefit from having a family, and 92% were sympathetic to the number of children in care that needed a family. Additionally, while discussing their reasons for foster caring a child in the social care system, foster carers stressed how adoption would provide children with a "permanent" and "stable" home, thus positioning themselves as altruistic. The most widely familiar modern function of foster care is as an altruistic substitution for biological children, typically due to infertility or child mortality (Volk, 2011).

Under these circumstances, foster parents are strongly motivated by a (potentially innate) desire to raise children but do not have any biological children of their own to whom they can apply this altruistic motivation.

The next factor why foster carers choose to foster a child is Life Dissatisfaction. Life Dissatisfaction is when a person may feel lonely in life, but satisfaction was only found in foster care for a child. The participants of the study, which are

foster carers, verbalized that they found satisfaction and fulfillment in foster caring a child. Foster carers might feel and find that the children they are foster caring can fix their situation, which is loneliness and dissatisfaction.

Reasons to life dissatisfaction can be rooted to the yearning of some people to see their genes in the next generation; they crave being pregnant and breastfeeding; they want some degree of control over their child's intrauterine environment and genetic makeup. It can be noted from this reason that becoming a parent is one of the most fulfilling things a person can do, but even with modern reproductive technologies, not all couples and individuals who would like to have children are able to.

It can, therefore, be conceded that one of the best things about helping thousands of hopeful parents complete the foster care process is seeing the joy on a new foster parent's face when they hold the child for the first time. Their dream is to one day have a baby they can love and care for forever. For these families, foster care often allows them to feel whole—by completing their family. For these foster carers, the joy of starting a family is difficult to describe. It's a clarifying moment — something that makes anyone realize what matters in life.

Furthermore, the Desire to Nurture a Child also became a compelling factor to fostering carers when they do not have children at home. Some foster carers enjoy taking care of a child (Ramirez, 2001). One of the foster carers who participated in the study cited that she was foster caring a child because she wanted to have a child at home; to have an experience in nurturing a child since she and her husband does not have a child yet.

Being able to raise a child allows many single parents and couples to fulfill their greatest dream or desire to build and have a family of their own.

Foster caring a child allows them to fulfill their dreams to become parents. All of the moments they spent playing with dolls as a child, the daydreams they had about playing catch with their child in their front yard — all of those dreams become potential realities the moment they foster care a child.

It can be surmised from the findings that a world of opportunities and memories becomes available to them through foster care programs. When they start to foster care, they are also adopting a whole new set of dreams and aspirations. Foster care gives infertile couples and single people the ability to become parents when they would not be able to have children otherwise. Foster care gives these hopeful individuals an opportunity to share their lives with a child and experience the joy and blessings of being able to nurture and raise a child.

Moreover, the Need to be Needed also plays a significant factor in the decision to foster careers to foster care for a child. Some people have to be depended on by young children to feel useful or to build up their self-esteem (Ramirez, 2001). The desire of adults to feel wanted allows their dependency needs to be met. One way of being able to feel this is by being a parent. Bringing foster children in their lives makes them feel better about themselves.

Knowing that foster carers made a loving decision to choose the best life possible for these children allows them to be grateful for their foster carers' courageous decision and thankful that so many people care about him or her. The love and support of foster parents who are emotionally and financially ready and able to parent and provide a good life will be making their most precious dreams come true. It is in this case that foster carers feel that they are appreciated and wanted when foster children realize their need of them – people who will take care of them. It can then be inferred that foster carers feel that the opportunity to bring many people a lot of happiness would not occur if not because of them. However, when the desire to be needed and wanted to become too much, foster children's value may solely be based on their capacity to provide the needs of their foster carers. Therefore, these children become mere "objects for gratification."

## CONCLUSIONS

All the factors namely, Altruism, Companionship for One's Child, Life Dissatisfaction, Desire to Derive Income, Desire to Nurture a Child, Identification with Deprived Children and Need to be Needed affect the foster carers' decision to foster care a child. However, the four (4) prevalent factors why foster carers chose to foster care a child are Altruism, Life Dissatisfaction, Desire to Nurture a Child, and the Need to be Needed.

In light of the findings of this study, the main reasons and factors for foster care are: a) a child-centered motivation compels foster carers to pursue foster care, b) foster care often allows individuals to feel whole when they have a complete family, c) foster care gives hopeful individuals an opportunity to share their lives with a child and experience the joy and blessings of being able to nurture and raise a child, and d) foster carers feel that the opportunity to bring a child a lot of happiness would not occur if not because of them.

It can then be concluded that the process of foster care can be a complex and emotional process for foster carers. But it is also a genuinely rewarding journey.

Additionally, while each foster carer may have their own motivation to foster care a child, it should be based on something deeper – a motivation that should

have a positive impact to the foster child's life. For foster children, it is unfair for them only to be put to foster care to preserve a marriage or to replace a lost child – to fill someone else's shoes. Factors for foster caring must not be guided by selfish reasons. These individuals must hold a high standard of parenting than many birth or biological parents.

## **TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH**

The research can be used as a basis to actualize programs meant for foster carers so that they will be empowered in conducting their duties and responsibilities as foster carers. Such programs may include ensuring that foster carers are competent and confident in caring for a child. This means they must be able to promote physical, social and emotional development among children. For agencies, this study can be used for them to constantly check the individual or couple's motives to foster care because they will have to be good role models to them.

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