



Protecting the Fraternal System: Challenges in Family Neglect Intervention

Edurne Gonzalez Goya¹, Mabel Segú Odriozola², Cinta Guinot Viciano³
Deusto University. Department of Social and Human Sciences

Abstract

This study explores decision-making processes regarding whether to separate or keep siblings together in situations of neglect or lack of protection. Conducted as part of the European project SAREA-POCTEFA and funded by FEDER, the research employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to foster collaboration among social intervention professionals from Spain and France. The project, led by the University of Deusto's Department of Social Work in partnership with two French educational institutions, focused on addressing critical challenges in the care of children in protective systems.

Over four years, a multidisciplinary working group, composed of professionals in child welfare and out-of-home care, co-constructed best practices for sibling-related decision-making. Through regular meetings and systematic analysis using Atlas.ti software, the group developed an evidence-based model to guide interventions on preserving or separating sibling relationships following an abandonment declaration.

Findings reveal a general inclination to keep siblings together during forced removals, reflecting the recognition of sibling bonds as vital sources of emotional stability. However, this principle often competes with systemic constraints, as organizational priorities and resource limitations influence case-by-case decisions. Former residents of care homes expressed a strong preference for maintaining sibling unity, emphasizing its importance for their sense of identity and continuity. In contrast, professionals highlighted divergent views, weighing the potential benefits of unity against practical challenges in certain cases.

This research highlights the complexity of sibling-related decision-making in child welfare systems and underscores the need for systemic reforms to prioritize individualized care. The findings provide transferable insights for advancing professional practices internationally and addressing a significant gap in the literature on sibling dynamics in protective care.

Keywords: child welfare; neglect; Participatory Action Research; sibling relationships.