AGE COMPOSITION OF CHILDREN IN THE SUBSTITUTE FAMILY CARE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Pavla Štochlová

University of South Bohemia, Faculty of Health and Social Studies, Department of Social Work, České Budějovice, Czech Republic

Abstract

The article describes the situation of placing children for adoption and in foster care in the Czech Republic, and collects the relevant data regarding the children recorded in the database of regional authorities for the respective year, focusing on their age composition. Individual groups of the researched unit are always divided into the children placed for adoption, the children placed in foster care and the children that have been placed in the substitute family care with no success in the given research period. The respective data apply to the entire Czech Republic being divided into individual regions.

Objective: The objective of the research was to establish the age composition of the children placed for adoption, in foster care and in no substitute family care in the Czech Republic in 2006.

Material and methods: In order to acquire the necessary data, the methods of the quantitative research, especially, the techniques for the secondary and contents data analysis of the official documentation were applied.

Results: The given research established that a relatively extensive number of children older than three years are placed in foster care as well as for adoption. It was established in the research sample of the children, which were placed in these selected types of the substitute family care with no success, that children older than three years represent the absolute majority.

Conclusion: The outcome of the research conducted brings a fairly optimistic view at the existing situation in the area of placing children for adoption and in foster care in the Czech Republic. It is important to know the real situation in these issues not only due to rebutting any kind of myths lingering with the general public but also due to supporting work of workers in Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children and making implementation of the substitute family care more efficient.

Key words: child – placement – adoption – foster care – age – Czech Republic

INTRODUCTION

The substitute family care is still a very up-to-date and often discussed topic. Especially, the amateur public remains with an opinion supported by many non-governmental entities and some media that unnecessarily many children are placed in institutions and that respective governmental authorities are unable to help them to return to their biological parents or at least to find suitable foster parents. In connection with these issues, the Czech Republic faces the long-term criticism for an excessively high number of children placed in the institutional

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

care. However, the fact that only a certain percentage of those children are, for various reasons, assigned for placement in the substitute family care, is rarely mentioned. Return to the original family is very difficult or impossible for many children and it is impossible to find a suitable foster family for them in many cases. Mainly, it concerns children of another ethnic group than of the majority one, children with health difficulties and children at an advanced age. Therefore, age is one of the factors having an impact on the situation. The author focuses on these issues and maps, herein and in a complex way, the age composition of the children suitable for selected types of the substitute family care, i.e. adoption and foster care, in the given research period, in the entire Czech Republic.

METHODS AND MATERIAL

In order to acquire the necessary data, the methods of the quantitative research, especially, the techniques for the secondary and contents analysis of the relevant data from the official documentation were applied.

The secondary data analysis is a quantitative objective technique applicable to research of the data having been already collected for other purposes. The contents analysis is a quantitative technique working with texts and analysing them under the prescribed criteria. The contents analysis is the most frequently applied quantitative method for document analyses. Any tangible record of human activities established for purposes of no research is considered as a document (Disman 2002).

For the purpose of the conducted research, the author collected the data necessary for the project through the technique of the data contents analysis from the file documentation of the children suitable for adoption and foster care in 2006 in the South Bohemian, Moravia-Silesian, Olomouc, Central Bohemian and Ústí nad Labem regions and municipality of the Capital of Prague and from various material provided by employees of the given workplace at the regional offices. The remaining part of the data was acquired by a questionnaire that workers of Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children (DSLPC) in the respective region of the Czech Republic filled in and sent via e-mail to the author. This form of providing the sought data was used by authorities of the South Moravian, Karlovy Vary, Hradec Králové, Liberec, Pardubice, Plzeň, Zlín and Vysočina Regions.

Due to viewing the personal documentation of children and processing the personal and sensitive data, the author always had to fill in and sign the respective confidentiality forms duly in all DSLPC workplaces. The author made no further notes of the respondents' personal data, which could lead to their direct identification.

The researched unit comprised of the children, which were recorded and listed as children suitable for placement for adoption and in foster care with Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children at the regional offices in all fourteen regions of the Czech Republic as of the day of the data collection. The research focused on the children placed and not placed for adoption and in foster care in 2006, i.e. the period from 1 January to 31 December 2006. The data was collected at the respective workplaces in the period from January to March 2007.

Table 1. Size of researched unit – Czech Republic

Type of placement	Number	Percentage
Children placed for adoption	444	53
Children placed in foster care	204	24
Children placed in no substitute family care	199	23
Total	847	100

Table 1 shows the size of the researched unit in a complex way for the entire Czech Republic. The researched unit comprised of the total of 847 children (100%), out of which 444 (53%) were placed for adoption in the researched period, 204 (24%) in foster care and 199 children (23%) were placed in no substitute family care in the given year. 100% of the respondents were arranged from the required unit during the research.

Table 2. Size of researched unit – regions in the Czech Republic

Region	Children placed for adoption	Children placed in foster care	Children placed in no substitute family care	Total
South Bohemian	34	13	11	58
South Moravian	32	16	8	56
Karlovy Vary	37	22	13	72
Hradec Králové	23	12	10	45
Liberec	25	6	10	41
Moravia-Silesian	52	53	37	142
Olomouc	23	15	18	56
Pardubice	13	12	6	31
Plzeň	16	5	3	24
Central Bohemian	38	5	18	61
Ústí nad Labem	61	21	53	135
Vysočina	10	8	1	19
Zlín	13	2	4	19
Municipality of the Capital of Prague	67	14	7	88
Total	444	204	199	847

Table 2 shows numbers of the respondents in the researched unit divided according to the type of placement in the substitute family care and individual regions in the Czech Republic. Out of the total of 847 respondents (100%), there were 58 (7%) respondents in the South Bohemian Region, 56 (6%) in the South Moravian Region, 72 (9%) in the Karlovy Vary Region, 45 (5%) in the Hradec Králové Region, 41 (5%) in the Liberec Region, 142 (17%) in the Moravia-Silesian Region, 56 (7%) in the Olomouc Region, 31 (4%) in the Pardubice Region, 24 (3%) in the Plzeň Region, 61 (7%) in the Central Bohemian Region, 135 (16%) in the Ústí nad Labem Region, 19 (2%) in the Vysočina Region, 19 (2%) in the Zlín Region and 88 (10%) at the Municipality of the Capital of Prague.

RESULTS

The outcome concerning the age composition of children processed in a complex way for the entire Czech Republic and divided according to their placement in the substitute family care.

Table 3 shows the age composition of children in the Czech Republic, placed for adoption in 2006. Out of the total of 444 chidren (100%), there were 361 children (82%) at the age of 0–1 years, 36 children (8%) at the age of 2 years, 19 children (4%) at the age of 3 years and 28 children (6%) at the age of 4 years or older.

Table 3. Age of children placed for adoption

Region	Age 0–1 years	Age 2 years	Age 3 years	Age 4 years and older	Total
South Bohemian	27	2	4	1	34
South Moravian	27	4	0	1	32
Karlovy Vary	25	3	2	7	37
Hradec Králové	19	3	1	0	23
Liberec	20	2	2	1	25
Moravia-Silesian	35	7	4	6	52
Olomouc	19	1	1	2	23
Pardubice	11	1	1	0	13
Plzeň	15	1	0	0	16
Central Bohemian	32	4	1	1	38
Ústí nad Labem	51	4	2	4	61
Vysočina	10	0	0	0	10
Zlín	11	2	0	0	13
Municipality of the Capital of Prague	59	2	1	5	67
Total	361	36	19	28	444

Table 4. Age of children placed in foster care

Region	Age 0–1 years	Age 2 years	Age 3 years	Age 4 years and older	Total
South Bohemian	0	1	6	6	13
South Moravian	6	5	2	3	16
Karlovy Vary	7	6	4	5	22
Hradec Králové	1	3	0	8	12
Liberec	1	0	1	4	6
Moravia-Silesian	9	6	7	31	53
Olomouc	4	0	0	11	15
Pardubice	0	4	3	5	12
Plzeň	0	0	0	5	5
Central Bohemian	0	2	1	2	5
Ústí nad Labem	3	7	2	9	21
Vysočina	7	1	0	0	8
Zlín	0	1	0	1	2
Municipality of the Capital of Prague	5	2	3	4	14
Total	43	38	29	94	204

Table 4 shows the age composition of children in the Czech Republic, placed in foster care in 2006. Out of the total of 204 children (100%), there were 43 children (21%) at the age of one or younger, 38 children (19%) at the age of 2 years, 29 children (14%) at the age of 3 years and 94 children (46%) at the age of 4 or older.

Table 5. Age of children placed in no substitute family care

Region	Age 0–1 years	Age 2 years	Age 3 years	Age 4 years and older	Total
South Bohemian	1	0	0	10	11
South Moravian	0	2	2	4	8
Karlovy Vary	3	1	0	9	13
Hradec Králové	1	0	3	6	10
Liberec	0	1	0	9	10
Moravia-Silesian	1	1	2	33	37
Olomouc	0	1	0	17	18
Pardubice	0	1	0	5	6
Plzeň	1	0	1	1	3
Central Bohemian	4	1	4	9	18
Ústí nad Labem	8	8	9	28	53
Vysočina	0	0	1	0	1
Zlín	2	1	1	0	4
Municipality of the Capital of Prague	1	0	0	6	7
Total	22	17	23	137	199

Table 5 shows the age composition of children in the Czech Republic in 2006, placed in no substitute family care. Out of the total of 199 children (100%), there were 22 children (11%) at the age of one or younger, 17 children (9%) at the age of 2 years, 23 children (12%) at the age of 3 years and 137 children (69%) at the age of 4 years or older.

DISCUSSION

When designing the project in order to conduct this research, the author based it on the outcome of her bachelor thesis elaborated within her studies at Masaryk's University. During the research conducted for the thesis in the South Moravian Region in 2006, it emerged that applicants for the substitute family care (SFC) have no comprehensive idea about which children were assigned for adoption or foster care; in connection with this unknowing, they lay excessive demands on them in the questionnaires and then, it slows down implementation of the substitute family care significantly or makes it completely impossible. For instance, the given research implied that the majority (63%) of the adoption applicants wishes to adopt a child under the age of one (Štochlová 2007). However, all applicants are sufficiently informed by the regional authorities and, therefore, are aware of the fact that this understandable but very high demand reduces their chances for successful adoption. This fact is connected with the statement by Opatřil (2008) who believes that the applicants very often and strongly put their own interests (to create a complete family is one of them) before interests of children. Whereas, the chances of success are indirectly proportional to demands laid on children, which the applicants determine in their applications. Then, this fact, among others, causes that

they wait for their longed-for child from the institution even for several years.

The Czech Republic is exposed to the long-term criticism for having an excessively high number of children growing in the institutional care. The international organisation UNICEF stated in its report to the United Nations that the situation in the Czech Republic is critical in this sense (Summary Report of the Study on the Impact of the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 2004). Also the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic released the outcome of the research "Establishing of the Number and Characteristics of Endangered Children under the Age of Three in Institutions in Europe" in its report in 2005. The research states that the highest number of children under the age of three years lives in institutions in the Czech Republic, which is the highest number out of the 32 monitored European countries (MLSA 2005). These results are very serious for the Czech Republic and its interest should be to have as many abandoned and endangered children as possible growing in families and not in institutions.

For a long period of time, the country has been criticised for the high number of children in institutions even by various international organisations. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, 1,974 children were placed for the institutional upbringing in 2006 (MLSA 2009). Therefore, the total number of children in the institutional care becomes even higher. Table 1 shows the outcome of the conducted research that out of this high number, only 847 children are listed with the regional authorities and, therefore, assigned for placement in the substitute family care. Out of these children, the workers of DSLPC succeeded in placing up to 648 children (77%) in new adoptive or foster families in 2006.

Table 2 shows an overview of the children suitable for the substitute family care per individual region. It emerged that most children assigned for placement in new families were listed in the Moravia-Silesian Region (142 children) and Ústí nad Labem Region (135 children). The author believes that it would be interesting to conduct a research focusing on the connection with the demographic composition of the population in the respective regions.

Table 3 monitors the age composition of children in the Czech Republic, placed for adoption in 2006. Out of the total of 444 children, most of them (82%) were placed for adoption at the age of 0–1 years. However, it is impossible to disregard the fact that up to 47 children (10%) went to new adoptive families at the age of 3 year or older although the adoption applicants lay higher demands on children in regard to their age (see above). Novotná and Průšová (2004) added to these issues: "The age composition of children suitable for adoption changes significantly. With regard to the older age of the applicants, a group of those who have an inadequate age gap with infants grows. Children at the age of 3 or older would be suitable for this group of the applicants." Furthermore, the above mentioned authors also see certain negatives in the young age of children that these applicants should be aware of. They state that the young age of children fully satisfies the majority of the applicants but it also brings much risk concerning determination of the forecast in their further development and the risk related to potential failures in the adoption process (Novotná and Průšová 2004). After, the situation of an older child coming into a new family is described by Schoolerová (2002): "The majority of older children coming into an adoptive family come from a disturbed and dysfunctional household. Along with their baggage, they also bring their various habits acquired in their biological families. They are accustomed to certain rules. No talking. No trust. No feelings. The defence mechanisms, which these children bred inside themselves in relation to the experienced reality, become deeply embedded in their behaviour." To bring up a child from the age of three (or even an older child) requires much patience and effort than to bring up an infant. A child has experienced much during the three years of her life, so it is much more difficult to get accustomed to her new surroundings and people and it is very demanding and yet important for new parents to gain the child's trust.

Table 4 shows the age composition of children in the Czech Republic, placed in foster care in 2006. Out of the total number of these children (204), the majority (60%) was older than three years. This fact undoubtedly is connected with another fact that the foster

care applicants are often much more tolerant than the adoption applicants in regard to their requirements for a child's age (Štochlová 2007). However, it is necessary to mention that in case of this substitute family care, the relationship between children and foster parents is substantially freer than in case of adoption. For instance, the foster care does not create the kinship between a child and foster parents and their relatives.

Table 5 shows the age composition of children in the Czech Republic in 2006, placed in no substitute family care. Out of the total of 199 children, 160 children (81%) were at the age of three or older. It is necessary to state that in case of many of those children, their age exceeded 10 years. It is the older age of children that is one of the reasons why their placement in new families fails. Furthermore, the author considers it interesting to introduce the fact that due to the further research of this group of children, it was established that 116 (58%) of them were from other ethnic groups than the majority one and 84 (42%) of them suffered from various health problems (Štochlová and Kozlová 2008).

CONCLUSION

This article monitors the real situation in our country and offers a reply to the question, at which age the children are adopted and placed in new foster families.

For various reasons, only a certain percentage of the children growing in the institutional care are listed with the regional authorities and, therefore, "suitable" for placement in the substitute family care. A high percentage of those children are at the advanced age and, therefore, it is often difficult to place them in a new family, specifically, in case of adoptation.

The research conducted showed that the workers of Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children succeed in placing even the children older than 3 years and not in small numbers, in new families in case of adoption. In case of the children placed in foster care, the children older than three years form the absolute majority. In case of the children placed in no substitute family care in the given researched period, there is 81% of them older than three years, which is one of the possible reasons for failure in placement in new families.

These results are very positive and optimistic for the issues regarding the substitute family care. They point out that an idea that the general public has about the real situation in the area is not absolutely clear and, therefore, criticism of social workers is not fully legitimate in this sense. Thus, the outcome may serve to potential SFC applicants in addition to experts in the field of the substitute family care, and to the general public in order to acquire a realistic view of the issues concerning placement of children for adoption and in foster care in the Czech Republic.

Abbreviations and terms:

– OSV – adoption (AD).
– PP – foster care (FC).
– NRP – substitute family care (SFC) (however, for the purpose of the research, this concept is reduced only to two selected types of SFC – adoption and foster care).
– OSPOD – Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children (DSLPC).
– KÚ – regional authorities (RAs).
– Children placed for AD – the children listed with DSLPC in 2006 as suitable for placement for adoption and were placed in this type of the substitute family care as of the date of data collection.
– Children placed in FC – the children listed with DSLPC in 2006 as suitable for placement in foster care and were placed in this type of the substitute family care as of the date of data collection.
– Children place in no SFC – the children listed with DSLPC in 2006 as suitable for placement in the substitute family care and were not placed for adoption or in foster care as of the date of data collection.
– Age – age of children was calculated on the day of data collection for the purpose of the research according to the birth year of a child listed in the file documentation:
  ▪ 0–1 year = a child at the age of one or younger (i.e. children born in 2006 and 2005);
  ▪ 2 years = a child at the age of two years (children born in 2004);
  ▪ 3 years = a child at the age of three years etc.

The article was created on the basis of processing of the data acquired within the project of University of South Bohemia's grant agency named Comparison of characteristics in children suitable for adoption and foster care in individual regions in the Czech Republic.

REFERENCES

1. Disman M (2002). Jak se vyrábí sociologická znalost [How to Create Sociological Knowledge]. 1st ed. Praha: Karolinum. 374 p. (Czech).
2. MLSA (2005). Národní koncepce rodinné politiky [National Concept of Family Policy]. Praha, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic. 59 p. (Czech).
3. MLSA (2009). Metodické doporučení MPSV č. 7/2009 k odbornému posuzování žadatelů o zprostředkování náhradní rodinné péče [Methodical Recommendations by MLSA No. 7/2009 on Expert Assessment of Substitute Family Care Applicants]. Praha. MLSA (Czech).
4. Novotná V, Průšová L (2004). K vybraným otázkám osvojování dětí [Selected Questions about Adoption of Children]. 1st ed. Praha: Linde. 159 p. (Czech).
5. Opatřil M (2008). Průvodce nových rodičů [New Parents Guide]. 1st ed. Brno: GRIFART. 34 p. (Czech).
6. Schoolerová JE (2002). Adopce, vztah založený na slibu [Adoption – a Relationship Based on Promise]. 1st ed. Praha: Návrat domů. 217 p. (Czech).
7. Štochlová P (2007). Problematika umísťování dětí do náhradní rodinné péče. Bachelor thesis. Brno: MU. 96 p. Instructed by PhDr. Dana Knotová, Ph.D. [Issues with Placement of Children in Substitute Family Care]. (Czech).
8. Štochlová P, Kozlová L (2008). Monitoring umísťování dětí do osvojení a pěstounské péče v České republice. In: Sborník příspěvků z mezinárodní konference konané v Praze Děti potřebují rodinu: Inovativní přístupy v práci s ohroženými rodinami [Monitoring of Placing Children for Adoption and in Foster Care in the Czech Republic. In: Collection of Contributions from the International Conference Held in Prague – Children Need Family: Innovative Approaches to Work with Endangered Families]. 1st ed. Praha: Občanské sdružení Člověk hledá člověka, pp. 30–37 (Czech).
9. Summary Report of the Study on the Impact of the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2004). Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. 22 p.

⊟ **Contact:**

Pavla Štochlová, Hrubínova 1459, 500 02 Hradec Králové
E-mail: pavla.stochlova@gmail.com