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Main results of quantitative research about orphans in kinship care in France


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Good Morning everyone and thank you for your virtual presence. My name is Coralie Aranda and I am a PhD student in sociology at the University of Lille. This presentation had been prepared in collaboration with Bernadette Tillard (professor) and Lucy Marquet (lecturer and demographic researcher), both from the University of Lille, in France.

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Research Subject





- Study carried out in 2018 in 2 departments of the North of France (North & Pas-de-Calais)
- Situation of orphaned children and young persons in kinship care

Orphanhood is an extremely rare phenomenon in France, **excepted for foster children and young people**

General population: approximately **3%** of children and young people (age < 25)
 => C. Flammant, S. Pennec and L. Toulemon, 2015

Young persons in care (foster care and kinship care) : around **30%** of young persons (age = 17-20) => I. Frechon, E. Abassi, P. Breugnot, C. Ganne, C. Girault et al., 2019


Children and Young persons in kinship care : 1 of 5 cases (age < 18)
 => C. Sellenet (dir.), 2013 & B. Tillard and S. Mosca, 2016

Today, we would like to provide you the main results of a quantitative research focused on the situation of orphaned children in kinship care in France. In this study carried out in 2018 in two departments of the North of France (*Nord* and *Pas-de-Calais*), an orphan is a child or young person deprived by death of one or both parents.

Our study is based on the observation that orphanhood is an extremely rare phenomenon in France, with the exception of children in care.

In 2015, a demographic study realized by **Cécile Flammant, Sophie Pennec et Laurent Toulemon**, showed that approximately 3% of children and young persons below 25 years old were orphans. In the same period, a longitudinal study conducted by **Isabelle Frechon** on the access to autonomy of young people in care aged from 17 to 20 years old, showed that approximately 30% of respondents were orphans, having lost either one parent or both. As regard to kinship care children in particular, two studies realized by **Catherine Sellenet** in 2013 and by **Bernadette Tillard and Sarah Mosca** in 2016, show that one out of every five children in kinship care have lost either one parent or both.


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Quantitative survey = questionnaire sent by post to all kinship carers taking care of a child or young person aged under 18 years old => **921 individuals** => **458 completed questionnaire** (≈ 50%)

Identification of orphaned children in kinship care

- **23% are orphans (104/458) :**
 - 49% = maternal orphans (51/104)
 - 44% = paternal orphans (46/104)
 - 7% = double orphans (7/104)

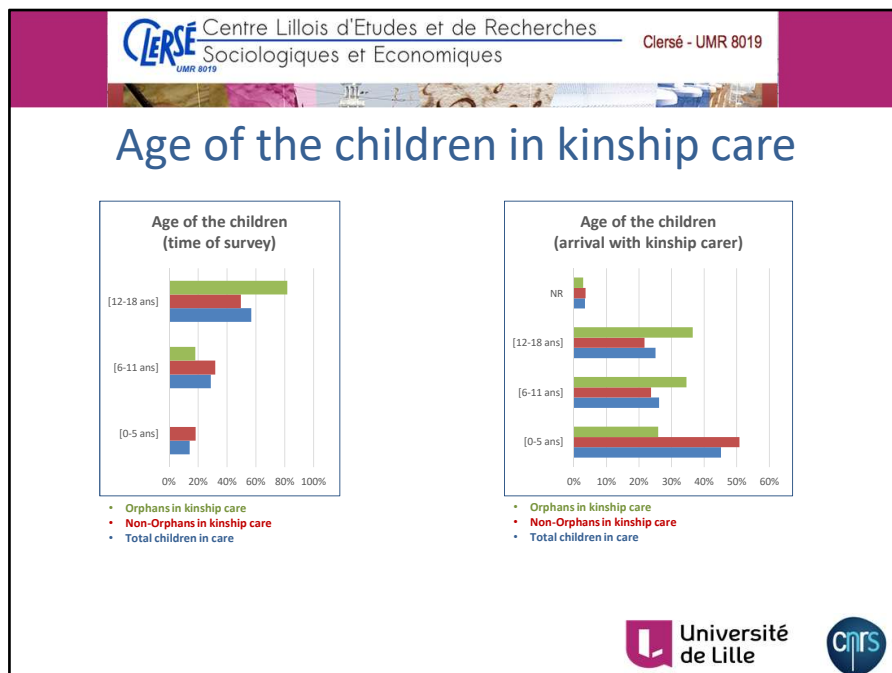
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Overrepresentation of maternal orphans among children in kinship care


As part of this study, a survey was conducted through a questionnaire sent by post to all kinship carers taking care of a child or young person aged under 18 years old, representing a total of **921 individuals**. Almost half them returned the completed questionnaire, representing 458 individuals. Those surveys highlight an important data by identifying orphaned children in kinship care, allowing us to provide the following quantitative results on this specific population. So far, the French child protection databases do not provide such information as the social workers of Child Protection services do not systematically collect this type of data.

The first result is that **23% of children and young people in kinship care lost at least one parent**, representing 104 situations: 49% of them are maternal orphans (51 situations), 44% are paternal orphans (46 situations) and 7% have lost both parents (7 situations). This result draws our attention because the situation is very different in general population. Paternal orphans are indeed between two or three times higher than maternal orphans, due to higher rate of early male mortality and later fertility of fathers in the French population. Rather, we observe an overrepresentation of maternal orphans among children in kinship care. This situation can be explained by the unequal division of educational task between mother and father, especially in case of parental separation. Maternal involvement in the upbringing and care for children still prevails, especially in the lower classes. Therefore, the death of the mother or her inability to care for the child more often results in the need to entrust the child to a third party than the death or the lack of paternal investment.





For all children in care, there are boys and girls in almost equal number. Among the orphans, there are slightly more boys than girls, but this difference is explained by the presence of unaccompanied minors, who are few in number but mainly male. Out of unaccompanied minors, there is no significant difference on the basis of gender.

However, **we observe differences concerning the age**: orphans are older than the average age of non-orphan children and young people in kinship care (14 for orphans to 11 for non-orphans). Orphans also arrive later to their kinship carer (9 years old for orphans to 6 years old for non-orphans). This is consistent with the results of demographic surveys which show that the risk of losing a parent naturally increases with the age of children.


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The situation of orphaned children does not significantly differ from that of non-orphan children for most criteria:

- **Contact with the parents:** If they are alive, 44% of them maintain contact with their father and 59% with their mother, although this contact progressively decreases throughout the duration of the placement.
- **Broken families:** Among non-orphans, parents very rarely live together (10%) and the qualitative survey we carried out showed that parent of orphans were also mostly separated before the death of one of them.
- **Large families** with 3 or more children (54%)
- ¼ of the care placements simultaneously involve **several siblings** from the same family
- **Care placements are long** : ¼ had already lasted more than 7 years prior to our survey, and were still on-going.
- **Main causes of placement** : conflictual relationship between the parents before the death of one of them (22%), health problems (21%), conflictual relationship the child and the surviving parent.





Other results of the survey show that the situation of orphaned children does not significantly differ from that of non-orphan children for most criteria: If they are alive, 44% of them maintain contact with their father and 59% with their mother, although this contact progressively decreases throughout the duration of the placement.

Among non-orphans, parents very rarely live together (10%) and the qualitative survey we carried out showed that parent of orphans were also mostly separated before the death of one of them. The children in care often come from large families with three or more children (54%), without significant difference between orphans and non-orphans.

A quarter of the care placements simultaneously involve several siblings from the same family, more often two children. Care placements are long, as evidenced by the fact that a quarter had already lasted more than 7 years prior to our survey, and were still on-going.

Among orphans, the main causes identified by kinship carers for the child's arrival in their home are the conflictual relationship with the surviving parent. Other causes were conflicts between parents before the death of one of them (22%) and maternal health problems (21%). We also note that the moment at which the child arrived in the relative's home was different depending on whether the child lost their mother or their father.

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Kinship Carers



- Most kinship carers are **relatives** (82%) and come from the maternal side of the family (56%) => Significant solicitation of grandparents, uncles and aunts
- **Greater precarity** among these kinship carers than among the general population of the two departments studied
- **88%** of the kinship carers receive a **care allowance**

Specific trends for orphan children in kinship care

- **Younger kinship carers** => Orphans : 28% are < 45 to Non-orphans : 18%
- More often from the **same generation as the child's parents** (uncles, aunts, "fictive kin") or as the child him or herself (brothers and sisters) => Orphans : 48% to Non-orphans : 22% + Grandparents => Orphans : 45% to Non-orphans : 68%

⇒ **Greater diversity of relation among carers for orphaned children**

- **Educational monitoring** => Orphans : 38% to Non-orphans : 55%
- **Care allowances** => Orphans : 78% to Non-orphans : 92%

For all children in care, most kinship carers are relatives and come from the maternal side of the family. Only 8% are unrelated to the children. Concerning the relationship between the child in care and the kinship carer, we find trends in line with international studies, which highlight the significant solicitation of grandparents, uncles and aunts. Data collected confirmed a greater precarity among these kinship carers than among the general population of the two departments studied.

Kinship carers are "volunteer" so they are not paid a wage. A care allowance is provided to help address the costs of caring for a child, but not all kinship carers receive it (only 88% receive it) and they do not always seem to be aware that they can receive family benefits and sometimes tax cuts, depending on the number of children they look after.

However, a specific trend can be noted for orphaned children: their kinship carers are generally younger (28% are under 45 years old compared to 18% for non-orphaned children) and are more often from the same generation as the child's parents or as the child him or herself (48% to 22%). This is consistent with the fact that there is a greater diversity of relation among carers for orphaned children. Uncles, aunts, older siblings and "fictive kin" play a more important role in caring for orphans, which reduces the role of grandparents (who represent 45% of carers of orphans compared to 68% for non-orphans). Furthermore, orphans are less often the subject of educational monitoring (38% to 55%) and the relatives who care for them receive care allowances less often (78% to 92%).


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- **Quantitative survey (458 questionnaires) :**
 - Sociological profile of orphaned children in kinship care & kinship carers
 - Circumstances and condition of the child placement
- **Qualitative survey (46 interviews with kinship carers) :**
 - Impact of orphanage on the children's life trajectory
 - Kinship carers' motivations to take care of a child or several children who are not theirs
 - Impact of this placement on the family organisation

This research is still ongoing but you can consult the first report published in march 2021 to the following link: <https://www.onpe.gouv.fr/actualite/rapport-recherche-orphelins-confies-leurs-proches-en-protection-lenfance>




This first quantitative survey has allowed to provide data on the sociological profile of orphaned children in kinship care and on the kinship carers themselves, but also on the circumstances and the condition of the child placement. It has been complemented by more than 40 interviews with kinship carers. These interviews allowed us to provide answers to issues related to the impact of orphanage on the children's life trajectory, the kinship carers' motivations to take care of a child or several children who are not theirs and the impact of this placement on the family organisation.


This research is still ongoing but you can consult the first report published in march 2021 to the following link:

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Thank you for your attention !

 Université de Lille 

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