2021

Foster Parents' Experience of Placement Disruptions for Youths in Foster Care

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Abstract

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MA, Walden University 2007

BS, Western Washington University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

Placement disruptions for youths placed in foster care have been the focus of multiple studies due to the negative and long-lasting impacts on these vulnerable youths. The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience of placement disruptions from the foster parent's perspective to gain further understanding of potential causes of placement disruptions and what may be helpful to prevent them. The study was based on the lens of attachment theory. Data were collected from interviews with six participants recruited on social media who were licensed in the State of Washington for at least 1 year and had experienced at least three placement disruptions. Interviews were completed by phone or online. Five themes emerged from the interpretative phenomenological analysis: foster parent support, communication, foster parent training, youth and foster parent trauma, and building relationships and connections. Results indicated that providing specific foster parent supports and education, allowing foster parents to be heard and be part of the decision-making team, and positive communication with birth parents leading to connections with youths helped to mitigate placement disruptions. Social workers' turnover had an impact on placement stability and relationships between social workers, foster parents, and youths. Findings may be used to reduce placement disruptions and effect positive social change for youths, foster parents, and child welfare agencies.

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Dedication

In loving memory of my parents, Denny and Hattie Alexander, who served as educators for more than 30 years, I dedicate my dissertation. I wish more than anything you were both here to see me reach this huge milestone in my life, but it is your love, inspiration, and never-ending belief in me my whole life that laid the groundwork and motivation for me to complete my dissertation journey. I love you both very much, and will continue to try to honor you both in the work I do moving forward.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Placement disruptions are a problem that child welfare agencies across the United States are facing, and the federal government is pushing states to find ways to mitigate placement disruptions due to the documented negative impacts for children placed in out-of-home care (Jedwab et al., 2019). Some children in out-of-home care experience upwards of 50 placements before they are returned to their biological parents or find permanency through adoption or guardianships (Villodas et al., 2016). These children have already experienced a great deal of trauma being removed from their biological parents and need a sense of security that could be offered through stable and secure placements (Villodas et al., 2016). Education, training, and increased support for foster parents have been demonstrated in previous research to play a critical role in promoting placement stability for youths in care, regardless of any child-related factors (Koh et al., 2014).

Foster parents are a valuable resource for children placed in out-of-home care, and foster parents want to create healthy and secure attachments with the children placed in their home in hopes that they can maintain placements. Foster parents also have expertise on this topic because they often have firsthand knowledge about placement disruptions. Foster parents could provide important information about their experience as well as provide potential ideas about change that could lead to placement stability (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). The current study addressed the lived experience of placement disruptions from the perspective of foster parents. The foster parents' perspective may provide further insight into the problem and provide information regarding what could be

done to mitigate placement disruptions, which could lead to positive social change for this vulnerable population of children.

In Chapter 1, a brief overview of the current literature on the topic of placement disruptions is presented to provide background information on the topic and justification for why this study was important. A detailed description of the problem statement is presented followed by a statement about the purpose of the study. The theoretical framework of the study is described, and the research questions are specified. The nature of the study is defined, followed by the definitions of key terms that were used in the study. Assumptions critical to the current research are discussed in detail, as well as the scope and limitations. Lastly, the significance of the study and potential contributions are identified.

Background

Epstein et al. (2015), Rock et al. (2015), and Villodas et al. (2016) examined placement disruptions and its impact on children. Epstein et al. found that by taking the time to find appropriate placements by matching children to the best potential caregiver at initial placement, outcomes are better and placements are more stable. Rock et al. found that older children often face more placement instability due to behaviors, and often remain in foster care longer. They also found that placement with siblings, placement with more experienced foster parents who have strong parenting skills, and placements that allow children to engage in services or extracurricular activities served as protective factors and increased placement stability. Villodas et al. found that children with adverse childhood experiences often struggle with post-traumatic stress, which can

make them more difficult to place; this impacts placement stability and suggests that the use of trauma-focused assessment and intervention and long-term permanency planning are two ways to mitigate placement disruptions.

Chambers et al. (2017) and Nybell (2013) provided information regarding the potential reasons why placement disruptions occur, and also attempted to describe some of these factors by giving youths in care a voice regarding placement instability. Chambers et al. completed a qualitative study to query alumni foster youths and ask them to define placement moves. Chambers et al. found that former foster youths had a number of ways to describe placement moves, which included packing and leaving, loss of personal belongings, potential of return home, a decision-making process that is often not inclusive of their voice, and the loss of time and relationships. Nybell found that youths feel that their voice is not heard or taken into account when making decisions about placement, and youths often do not have space to voice their needs, interests, or desires. Although Nybell's study was dated, it was relevant to the current study because there were only a few studies that addressed the voices of the youths.

Blakey et al. (2012) discussed some of the ways in which child welfare agencies began to mitigate placement disruptions through more support, education, and continuum of care for youths residing in out-of-home care and their caregivers. Blakely et al. found that states are trying to improve services for youths, are working on recruitment efforts and better education for foster parents, are being more collaborative and supportive using a team approach, and are working to provide more support to foster parents as a way to mitigate placement disruptions. Carnochan et al. (2013) presented data from the first

Children and Family Service Review that focused on placement disruptions, which is the review process for the federal government to hold child welfare agencies accountable and make some suggestions regarding what might support placement stability for youths in care. Carnochan et al. suggested that foster parents and foster youths should have services available to them to support placement stability, and that the utilization of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) and more focus on permanency planning are ways that states can improve placement stability.

Schuengel et al. (2009) conducted the only study in the last 10 years regarding attachment with foster parents. The researchers discussed the role of attachment and how it impacts the behavior of children and the relationship with caregivers, as well as treatment that might be helpful to help children feel safe to build relationships. They found, as expected, that youths with disrupted attachments struggle with placement stability, and that treatment can be beneficial to help children open up and socially engage with their foster parents to build trust and eventually create healthier attachments.

Taylor and McQuillan (2014) explored the perspective of foster parents and social workers to gain insight about placement disruptions and found that multiple factors played a role in disruptions, but the child's behavior, contact with birth family, and attachment struggles were predominant factors. Taylor and McQuillan also found that placement disruptions occurred more often with new foster parents that may have not been educated or prepared to deal with children who have trauma histories due to abuse and neglect. Taylor and McQuillan also discussed the importance of giving foster parents a voice in the research through qualitative inquiry to gain further insight and

understanding about placement disruptions and what is needed to mitigate these disruptions. Although this research was older than 5 years, Taylor and McQuillan's study was one of the few studies to address the value of focusing on the lived experience of foster parents who deal with placement disruptions. The gap in the literature that the current study addressed was the voice of foster parents, which could provide detailed information about the lived experience of placement disruptions and provide a path to understanding what is needed to maintain placements for youths in out-of-home care (see Bernedo et al., 2016).

Problem Statement

The consequences of placement disruption for youths removed from their biological parents and/or guardians due to abuse and neglect have been the focus of multiple researchers (Epstein et al., 2015; Villodas et al., 2016). These children are likely to have experienced a great deal of trauma in their young lives prior to removal from their biological homes (Villodas et al., 2016). The impact of placement disruptions on children's emotional, social, and psychological well-being can last well into adulthood (Rock et al., 2015). Vulnerable children who have experienced placement disruptions are at a great disadvantage (Epstein et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2015). They display behavioral problems and mental health instability, struggle to create healthy attachments, and remain in care longer than youths who do not experience placement instability (Blakey et al., 2012). The federal government has taken great interest in finding ways to mitigate placement disruptions due to the detrimental outcomes that have been documented in research for youths who have experienced placement disruptions (Carnochan et al.,

2013). The federal government mandated that all states address placement disruptions and provided specific direction about ways to mitigate placement disruptions (Carnochan et al., 2013). Specifically, the federal government suggested providing additional supports and education for foster parents and youths in foster care, including CASAs who work to ensure children's needs are being met, and greater supports for any caregivers who are working to achieve permanence for children in their care (Carnochan et al., 2013).

The most recent research has suggested that the foster parents who care for troubled youths play an important role in their adjustment to the new home and mitigating the risks of disruptive placements (Bernedo et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Although placement disruptions and the ramifications children endure have been demonstrated (Epstein et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2015; Villodas et al., 2016), there has been very little research dedicated to the lived experience of placement disruptions from the foster parent's perspective. For example, Taylor and McQuillan (2014) completed quantitative research on placement moves from the perspective of foster parents and social workers. The researchers found that foster parents needed more training to deal with children who have difficult behaviors, and they also found that foster parents were not valued as experts within the system. The researchers postulated that foster parents who received more training and support would feel more supported and able to maintain placements in their home. These results indicated the value of using a qualitative lens to query foster parents about their parenting role and the relationships they develop with youths placed in their homes to provide a more in-depth understanding about placement

disruptions and what is needed to maintain placements (Crum, 2010; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Although these studies were older than 5 years, they were two of the few research articles that addressed the foster parent's perspective, and they demonstrated what was lacking in current research, which was the voice of the foster parent and their experience of placement disruptions.

Bernedo et al. (2016) completed a quantitative study to examine the variables associated with placement disruptions in foster homes from the perspective of social workers. Bernedo et al. found that the relationship between caregiver and child had a significant impact on placement disruptions. In their discussion section, Bernedo et al. suggested that deeper understanding of this phenomenon from a foster parent's perspective could benefit future research on placement disruptions. Foster parents have more contact with youths in out-of-home placements than any other people, so they have a great deal of knowledge about factors that might support and maintain stable placements. Current research demonstrated the importance of the relationship between foster parents and youths, and the need for more research with foster parents to understand placement disruptions from their perspective, as well as to gain information on what foster parents believe might support stable placement (Bernedo et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience of placement disruptions and how attachment may feature in placement disruptions from the perspective of foster parents. In this study, foster parents had the opportunity to

describe the major contributing experiences that lead to placement disruptions, and what could have been helpful to mitigate the placement disruptions they experienced. I also explored what foster parents described as helpful for future efforts to maintain placements for children placed in out-of-home care. Foster parents also discussed their experience with attachment with the youths placed in their home, and how that impacted placement stability. A deeper and more meaningful understanding from foster parents provided a more contextual understanding of the challenges that foster children face, and created opportunities to discuss changes that are needed to mitigate placement disruptions (see Bernedo et al., 2016).

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the lived experience of placement disruptions for foster parents?

RQ2: How do foster parents experience attachments with foster children?

Theoretical Foundation

In previous research, there has been substantial emphasis on placement disruptions and ways to mitigate placement disruptions for children in out-of-home care due to the significant and far-reaching negative impacts that can occur when children are unable to form healthy attachments (Cherry, 2012). Bowlby (1988) asserted that the bond between mother and child is so important that separation prior to the connection/bond can impact the development and overall well-being of the child and have long-lasting and damaging effects. Bowlby argued that children were born with an innate desire to attach to a primary caregiver in order to have their basic needs met, and that continuous interaction with that primary caregiver was paramount in creating healthy attachments

later in life. Bowlby also argued that interruptions of the attachment could create lasting impacts on a child that could lead to depression, delinquency, increased aggression, and decreased intelligence. Foster children have suffered abuse and neglect, and their ability to form healthy attachments, according to Bowlby, has already been impacted. Coupled with their removal from their biological home to foster care, they experience more obstacles to forming healthy attachments (Villodas et al., 2016).

Foster parents work to create healthy attachments with the children who are placed in their home from the minute placement occurs (Crum, 2010). Foster parents attempt to create structure and safety for the children to garner trust and to develop a relationship that feels safe. Youths who have experienced multiple placement moves can struggle to create healthy attachments (Unrau et al., 2008). Bowlby (1988, as cited in Schuengel et al., 2009) suggested that responses to separation can impact emotional security, which can lead to behavioral challenges for children and can impact relationships with their caregivers. When youths are unable to create healthy attachments with foster parents, it can be a barrier to placement stability (Unrau, et al., 2008). In the current phenomenological study, attachment theory provided the theoretical framework to guide the research questions, interview guide, and data analysis plan.

Nature of the Study

This was a qualitative study using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with foster parents to gather valuable and in-depth narratives about foster parents' experience with placement disruptions. I assumed that foster parents had expertise and knowledge about this topic and could add

valuable insight into this complex issue for vulnerable children in out-of-home care. I also assumed that foster parents could provide direction in regard to potential supports that might mitigate placement disruptions in the future, which could create a pathway to positive social change for children in out-of-home care.

Smith (2011) shared that IPA has been used to develop deeper understanding about how people interpret their lived experience with a given phenomenon. Gathering narratives from each participant allowed me to understand each participant's experience, as closely as possible, to gain understanding of the individual lived experience of placement disruptions.

Definitions

Attachment: A deep and enduring connection and/or bond between two people (Bowlby, 1988).

Biological parents: A mother and father who have conceived a child (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

Child welfare system: The government agency that investigates allegations of child abuse and neglect and takes action to protect children when needed by removing them from their biological parents and placing them in out-of-home care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

Foster parents/caregivers: Interchangeable terms used to identify individuals who are licensed and approved to provide care for children who are in the custody of the state after being removed from their biological parents and/or legal guardians (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

Out-of-home care: Placements that occur when children have been removed from their biological parents due to abuse or neglect and are placed outside of their home of origin (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

Placement disruptions/changes/instability: Any placement moves that occur for children placed in out-of-home care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

Placement stability: Maintaining a placement that does not lead to moves or changes for youths placed in out-of-home care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

Assumptions

Certain assertions were made and believed to be true but were difficult to verify. To be selected as a participant for the research study, foster parents had to have had experience with multiple placement disruptions, and I assumed participants would be honest about having experience with placement disruptions. I also assumed that foster parents would be open and honest in their responses to all interview questions. In addition, I also assumed that the number of participants selected would be sufficient to provide an adequate amount of data to identify emerging and relevant themes for the research.

Another assumption was that I would be able to refrain from bias and judgments during the structured interview process. I assumed that the interview questions would be suitable and sufficient to elicit the participant's experience with placement disruptions. In addition, I assumed that I would ask questions in a manner that would help participants

feel comfortable to speak open and honestly about their experience of placement disruptions.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, the lived experience of placement disruptions through the foster parents' perspective was examined using IPA. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews completed by phone or online with foster parents who had experienced placement disruptions. I included foster parents who were licensed in the state of Washington for at least 1 year, and who had experienced at least three or more placement disruptions with youths placed in their homes.

Regarding delimitations, foster parents who were less experienced or had not experienced placement disruptions in their home were not included in this study. Also, relative and fictive kin placements were not included in this study to maintain specific focus on foster parents. However, these types of providers could be included in future research to understand how placement disruptions impact these groups, as well. Another delimitation was that participants were recruited from multiple counties in Washington State, so it will be important to replicate this research in other areas to understand any potential differences that might exist for foster parents in other parts of the United States.

Limitations

Because I attempted to understand human behavior regarding placement disruptions, there were several limitations that need to be noted. The participants in this study were selected from a foster parents' forum group in the northwestern part of the State of Washington. Therefore, the results may not be transferrable to foster parents

within or outside of the United States. Also, the placement disruptions that were discussed included children who reside in Washington State, which may not represent the experience for children in other states. Also, the results of this study may not be transferrable to relatives or fictive kin caregivers because these types of caregivers already have established connections with the youths, which creates a different dynamic in placements when compared to foster parents who are meeting children for the first time when they are placed. This study included IPA, which also created some limitations due to the nature of qualitative research. In the tradition of IPA, semi-structured interviews were conducted by phone or online with all participants, who may not have always been truthful, and social desirability bias may have affected the results.

Significance

The current study was unique because it focused on the lived experience of placement disruptions from the perspective of foster parents. Foster parents have a great deal of experience and knowledge about placement disruptions, and a more specific focus on foster parents and placement disruption was recommended in recent research (Bernedo et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Research has suggested that children who have resided in foster care are already at a significant disadvantage in terms of social and emotional well-being and often struggle with finding their way and becoming successful adults (Rock et. al., 2015). Some researchers have suggested that it is important to give children in foster care a voice to further understand their experience (Nybell, 2013), while other researchers have focused efforts to find answers to the

problems that surround placement disruptions, such as more education and support for foster parents so they are able to maintain placements (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

Foster parents have expertise when it comes to caring for children who have been removed from their biological parents and could provide valuable information for current research by sharing information about their experience with placement disruptions (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). The gap that existed in the literature was qualitative research that allowed foster parents to talk about the lived experience of placement disruptions and ways to mitigate those disruptions (see Bernedo et al., 2016). A deeper and more meaningful understanding from the individuals who are doing the work could provide more context for the problem and also create space in the literature to begin to think about changes that are needed, such as more training and support for foster parents to mitigate placement disruptions and create positive social change (Bernedo et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2024).

Summary

Existing research on placement disruptions has documented the long-standing negative impacts that placement instability has on children who have been removed from their parents and placed in out-of-home care (Epstein et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2015; Villodas et al., 2016). The research has provided a deeper understanding of the complex issues surrounding placement disruptions from a variety of perspectives including social workers, youths, the federal government, and foster parents. The role that foster parents play in addressing placement disruptions to create positive social change for youths in care is vital (Bernedo et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2024), and research on the lived

experience of placement disruptions from the foster parents perspective has the potential to provide deeper understanding of placement disruptions and can also provide information as to what supports and/or resources might allow for placement stability moving forward (Bernedo et al., 2016). In Chapter 2, an overview of the literature search strategies and the theoretical foundation that guided the study is presented. The chapter also includes historical context of the child welfare and foster care systems, as well as the limitations and benefits of current literature on placement disruptions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The negative impacts of placement disruptions for youths who reside in foster care have been the focus of multiple studies (Epstein et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2015; Villodas et al., 2016). These vulnerable youths have been exposed to trauma due to abuse and neglect concerns, which has led to placement in the foster care system where they often experience multiple placements (Villodas et al., 2016). The experience of multiple placement disruptions has long-lasting and damaging impacts to these youths, as they begin to experience mental health instability and behavioral problems, engage in risky behaviors, and often are not able to create secure attachments with others (Blakey et al., 2012; Epstein et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2015). Research on placement disruptions suggested that foster parents play a central role in supporting youths in foster care and in mitigating placement disruptions (Bernedo et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014), but there has been little research dedicated to understanding placement disruptions from the foster parent's perspective. The purpose of the current study was to understand the lived experience of placement disruptions from the foster parent's perspective to gain insight into the contributing factors to placement disruptions and ways to mitigate placement disruptions in the future.

In this chapter, a brief overview of the literature search strategies employed and the theoretical framework that provided the foundation for the study is presented. Literature on the history of foster care, the child welfare system, and placement disruptions is reviewed to provide an understanding of how the system works and the benefits and limitations of current research on placement disruptions. This chapter

concludes with a summary and discussion of the ways the current study contributed to filling the gap in current literature regarding foster parents' perspectives on placement disruptions.

Literature Search Strategy

To locate current research for this literature review, I searched multiple databases through the Walden Library, including EBSCOHOST, PscyARTICLES, PsycINFO, SAGE premier, Academic Search Premier, ProQuest, SocINDEX, and Walden Dissertations. I also searched on Google Scholar and reviewed social work journals. The following terms were used in my literature review search: *attachment theory*, *placement disruptions*, *foster care*, *foster care placements*, *placement stability in foster care*, *placement disruptions in foster care*, *child welfare*, *foster parents*, *birth parents*, *foster children*, *adverse childhood experiences*, *impacts of placement disruptions over the last 5 years*, *foster care recruitment and retention*, and *mitigating placement disruptions*. I also reviewed relevant textbooks and books on attachment theory.

Theoretical Foundation

According to attachment theory, connection to others plays a vital role in children's development, personality, and the ability to connect to others across the life span (Crittenden, 2017). This theory claims that the bond that children develop with a caregiver provides a sense of security and stability that allows for the feeling of safety and the ability to trust and take risks with others in a relationship (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1949, 1988). Bowlby (1988) described the bond that is created between mother and child. His understanding of attachment laid the foundation for future research and

understanding of why it is important for children to connect with a caregiver so they are able to have secure attachments that lay the foundation for trusting and caring relationships in childhood and adulthood (Crittenden, 2017). Secure attachments occur when a caregiver responds to a child's cues and provides comfort and guidance, which allows the child to feel safe and to begin to explore as they grow older and develop. This begins as soon as a child is born when caregivers respond when a child is hungry, needs to be changed, or experiences some type of discomfort. The child learns that they will have their needs met by their caregiver and develops a sense of security and attachment (Crittenden, 2017).

Without these important attachments, children often struggle with stability and security. Their development and personality can be impacted, and they also struggle to create lasting, trusting, and secure relationships (Madigan et al., 2013). A secure attachment leads to a more confident child who is able to explore their environment knowing that they have a caregiver who will love them and support them, and an insecure attachment leads to a child who is lacking in confidence, which can lead to anxiety and worry when it comes to curiosity and exploration of the environment, which can stunt development and create a number of obstacles for a child that can have a lasting impact (Prather & Golden, 2009).

Building on the foundation that Bowlby laid, other researchers set out to gain further insight into the differing aspects of attachment, Ainsworth being one of the most notable. Together, Bowlby and Ainsworth (1988 & 1989 as cited in Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004) described attachment styles that are formed in childhood based on

children's interactions with their caregivers, which has an impact on their personality and emotion regulation into adulthood. Four attachment styles were discussed by Bowlby and Ainsworth: secure attachment, anxious-avoidant attachment, anxious-resistant attachment, and disorganized attachment.

Children with a secure attachment are able to adjust easily, can respond to other caregivers in a positive way, play and relate well with other children, are often more successful in school, and are able to trust others (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Children with anxious-avoidant attachments are often withdrawn and are resistant to engage with adults and peers and struggle to create healthy relationships and can even act out aggressively in stressful situations (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Children who have anxious-resistant attachment are often overly emotional, lack self-confidence, often remain very close to their primary caregiver, and avoid contact with peers (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). Lastly, children with a disorganized attachment never learn how to deal with separation from their caregiver, display aggressive and disruptive behaviors, often view others as a threat instead of a potential support, and either withdraw completely or become even more aggressive (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2014). Children who are placed in foster care have experienced a disruption in their attachment to their primary caregiver for different reasons that led to abuse and neglect, but also through separation due to removal, and these children often display behaviors that are consistent with disorganized attachment (Schuengel et al., 2009).

Attachment is an important theory to understand when it comes to children who have been removed from their parents and placed into foster care. Attachment theory

provided the theoretical foundation for the current study on placement disruptions from the perspective of foster parents. Children who have been unable to create secure attachments with their caregivers due to abuse and neglect issues, mental health instability, drug and alcohol struggles, domestic violence, and poverty are sometimes set up for failure that can significantly impact growth and development (Schuengel et al., 2009). Children in foster care need structure, consistency, and stability so they know what to expect, as this can relieve some of their feelings of distress (Prather & Golden, 2009). Due to children's struggles with attachment and differing attachment styles, some children are waiting to be disappointed by their caregiver because that is what they have experienced in their young lives. Youths with disrupted attachment styles often test the boundaries of relationships, rationalizing that they will control their experience with others through aggression or withdrawal because this gives them some sense of control in the relationship with their caregiver and others (Unrau et al., 2008). Fear and insecurity often will lead foster youths to not trust anyone; instead of letting someone in to help them, they block others from connecting with them (Unrau et al., 2008). There was limited research on attachment theory and placement disruptions, so I reviewed older studies to provide history and context of this phenomenon in the current study.

Because of the struggles with attachment that foster children experience, foster parents have a tremendous obstacle they must overcome to create a healthy relationship with the foster youths placed in their care. Foster parents have a desire to create healthy and trusting attachments, and they put a great deal of effort and energy into this endeavor (Crum, 2010). Children's trauma history that has impacted attachments can make

placement in foster homes very difficult, which is one of the major contributing factors to placement disruptions for children in care (Unrau et al., 2008). However, attachment styles can change with a positive experience with a caregiver where structure, consistency, and stability play a role in creating a healthy attachment even when initial attachments have been interrupted or severed (Prather & Golden, 2009).

Therapeutic Interventions to Improve Attachments With Foster Children

There have been multiple studies on attachment interventions for maltreated children placed in foster care that have demonstrated some promising results in developing more secure attachments between caregivers and youths placed in foster care (Kerr & Cossar, 2014). These interventions include working with caregivers or foster children alone and also working with caregivers and foster children together with a focus on how to communicate effectively to develop trusting relationships that lead to more secure attachments (Kerr & Cossar, 2014). Previous studies indicated that the younger a child is when they come into care, the more likely a secure attachment can be created with the caregiver, but the older a child gets, especially if the child has endured multiple placements disruptions, the more difficult it can be to overcome severed attachments (Kerr & Cossar, 2014). Any effort to improve attachments with children placed in out-of-home care would be beneficial and might impact placement disruptions, as more secure attachments could lead to improved relationships between foster parents and foster children.

Tokuyama and Nishizawa (2014) conducted an attachment-focused intervention program with foster parents and foster children from toddler age to first grade. The

intervention program included play sessions involving caregivers, children, therapists, and co-therapists that were aimed at increasing foster parents' sensitivity and awareness of the needs of their foster children to encourage a sense of trust by encouraging the foster parents to attend to the specific needs of the child. The play sessions helped foster parents understand how they should engage with the child to foster a sense of trust. The intervention program also included individual sessions with the foster parent and therapist to support the foster parent to understand the needs and states of the child, based on their trauma history, to encourage foster parent sensitivity. This, in turn, helped foster parents form attachments with the child placed in their care and also helped them understand how they needed to engage with the child to build a sense of trust to create a more secure attachment. Tokuyama and Nishizawa shared that this type of intervention has been successful and effective in reducing attachment and relationship difficulties between foster parents and the children placed in their care, which makes a great deal of sense as it develops sensitivity to the children's specific needs and practice at attending to those needs, which allows the child to feel a sense of security and trust.

As foster children get older, behaviors can become more difficult to manage due to trauma histories and severed attachments that lead to behavioral and emotional struggles (Kerr & Cossar, 2014). Several interventions have been used with older children, including individual and family counseling, group sessions, and interventions aimed at creating healthy and safe communication between foster parents and foster children (Kerr & Cossar, 2014). Hawton (2014) created a parenting education course called Engaging Adolescents that focuses on supporting parents to remain calm when

dealing with difficult teen behaviors by teaching them how to have persuasive conversations with their teenagers without losing control. This has been taught to over 20,000 parents in Australia and has proven to be an effective parent education program. Although this type of therapy is not aimed at improving attachment between caregiver and child, it would seem that it could be helpful with children placed in out-of-home care. Further research with this parenting program is needed to determine whether the application would translate for foster parents and foster children by creating more secure attachments with teens placed in their care by promoting calm communication when dealing with difficult teen behaviors. Interventions aimed at creating meaningful and calm communication between parents and children would seem to have the potential to create more stable and secure attachments. For the current study, it was important to understand how attachment theory and interventions that can promote more secure attachments might impact the lived experience of foster parents who have dealt with placement disruptions.

Literature Review

A thorough review of literature about the child welfare system and foster care was completed to provide a historical context and further understanding of the two systems that are set up to ensure children are safe when they are removed from their parents' care and placed outside of their homes. Although these two systems work together, they have very different responsibilities when it comes to child safety. The foster care system focuses on providing stability in the day-to-day living experience for youths placed in out-of-home care (Chittom & Geraldine, 2018), and the child welfare system works with

the court and other professionals to ensure parents and children are getting all of the services they need while working on the reunification process (O'Neill et al., 2012). Also, a thorough review of the literature was completed on placement disruptions to better understand the central problem through a quantitative lens, as defined by foster parents, social workers, and the federal government, and to gain insights from youths regarding their experience with placement disruptions and the impact they have had on them. Previous research demonstrated the long-lasting negative impacts that placement disruptions have on youths, which include disruptions in attachments that lead to difficulties in creating healthy relationships, as well as struggles with mental health, risky behaviors, substance and alcohol abuse, and delinquent behaviors, all of which can extend into adulthood (Epstein et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2015; Villodas et al., 2016). A review of attachment theory was also completed because this theory served as the theoretical foundation for the current study. Research has also provided some direction on ways to improve placement stability, which is also discussed in detail in the literature review.

Child Welfare System

Child welfare or child protection has a long history in the United States and can be described as consisting of three distinct eras that began during Colonial times (Myers, 2008). The first era spanned from Colonial times to 1875 when there were laws that made child abuse and neglect illegal, but there was no formal child protection system in place (Myers, 2008). There were laws that stated that parents must "train up their children" properly or judges could intervene to protect children and remove them from their

parents. In 1875, the second era of child protection began and the first nongovernmental organization dedicated to child protection was founded, the New York Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which came in the aftermath of the rescue of a 9-year-old girl, Mary Ellen Wilson, who was horribly beaten and neglected by her parents in New York (Myers, 2008). The woman who saved this child worked together with an animal protection advocate to create the New York Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which then served as a platform for other nongovernmental child protection societies, which also served as the court to protect abuse and neglected children (Myers, 2008).

It became apparent after the Great Depression that the non-governmental societies were dwindling, but many children were still suffering. The societies couldn't support child protection on a broader scale, so in the 1960s there was a large push to make child protection a public agency that was overseen by the government (Myers, 2008). There were multiple doctors that were instrumental in bringing awareness to injuries sustained by children that were non-accidental in nature, and Dr. Henry Kempe together with his colleagues published an article called "The Battered Child Syndrome." This put a spot light on child abuse and motivated an even greater interest in child protection (Myers, 2008). By the 1970s, government sponsored child protection agencies were in every state, and the federal government became involved to provide funding and oversight of all state agencies and each states adherence to the primary goals, policies, and laws created by the federal government (Chittom & Geraldine, 2018).

While each state carries out child protection in their own way with their own policies, procedures, and specific laws, all states mandate that child protection in a front-end emergency service that responds 24 hours a day to investigate child abuse and neglect allegations to ensure child safety (Gershun & Terrebonne, n.d.). The primary goal of child protection is to work with parents to mitigate any identified safety concerns within the home, so children can remain in their homes with their parents (Gershun & Terrebonne, n.d.). However, there are extreme circumstances of child abuse and neglect that warrant immediate removal to ensure child safety, and there can also be circumstances where immediate risk of child safety can't be mitigated with safety planning and extra support making removal imminent. When this occurs, children are placed outside of their parent's care while their parents complete court ordered services to mitigate any of the safety or risk factors that were cause for removal of the children (Gershun & Terrebonne, n.d.).

Foster care has provided many abused and neglect children across the United States a reprieve and safe haven while parents are given the opportunity to get supports in place to deal with whatever struggles they might be facing and have their children returned to their care (Wulczyn & Halloran, 2017). One of the key goals in finding initial placements is to find a home where the youth can remain until they can reunify with their parents or forever, if needed, so the youth do not face disruptions in their placement. Foster parents play a vital role in child protection, and it is imperative that they have the right supports, education, and understanding in order to ensure stable placements for children that are placed in out-of-home care (O'Neill et al., 2012).

History of Foster Care

Foster care in the United States has roots back to the early 1600s, but in the late 19th century, as the Children's Home Society movement began in the United States, a significant change occurred as more children were being removed from their parents due to abuse and neglect circumstances. (Myers, 2008). The Children's Home Society moved toward ensuring that children that could not remain with their parents were placed in family home settings, much like we see today in the United States (Leve et al., 2019). In the 1960s, there was a real push for child protection and welfare services to become public entities that were held accountable by the government, and this also translated to foster care, as state organizations took responsibility for investigating child abuse and neglect and ensuring that children that could not live with their parents safely had family homes where they could go (Leve et al., 2019). The role of foster parents today is vital to achieving child welfare goals of reunification and permanency, as the children have a safe and nurturing place to stay until they are returned to their parents or find adoptive placements (Chittom & Geraldine, 2018).

There are a variety of reasons people choose to become a foster parent, as some just want to help during a time of crisis, some are hoping to find children to adopt, and mostly foster parents are very well intentioned in their desire to help children that have been in abuse or neglect situations (Chittom & Geraldine, 2018). All states require a vetting process for licensing foster homes that includes criminal and CPS background checks and educational classes to help foster parents understand the trauma related to abuse and neglect circumstances as well as the expectations as to what is and what is not

okay while caring for a youths in out-of-home placement (Chittom & Geraldine, 2018). Foster parents are provided financial support when children are placed in their home, so they have the means to care for them, and the support is based upon the needs of the child.

Being a foster parent isn't always easy and is sometimes a very thankless job, especially when there are little to no supports in place and often times not enough education to help foster parents understand the trauma history of the children they bring into their homes (Yuri, 2015). Recruitment and retention efforts for foster parents is a prevalent theme across the United States currently, as foster parents play a vital role in keeping children that are placed outside of the home in a safe and secure home environment (Yuri, 2015). There has been a great deal of research centered on finding ways to educate and support foster parents in a way that will help them remain foster parents, so they can provide stable placements in hopes to achieve less disruptions for children in foster homes (Moore et al., 2016; Solomon et al., 2017; Yuri, 2015). Foster parents work very hard to create safe spaces for the children they care for, and they have first-hand experience and knowledge around caring for children that have been removed from foster care, which is why they play such a vital role in the current research proposal.

Placement Disruptions

There has been a great deal of research on placement disruptions due to the longstanding and negative impacts on the social, emotional, and overall well-being of youths that have experienced multiple placements (Epstein, et al., 2015; Rock, et al., 2015; Villodas, et al., 2016). Research has focused on this problem from multiple

perspectives to provide a clear understanding about the dynamics of placement

disruptions and the impacts that instability has on youths in foster care. A theme in

current research on placement disruptions is the type of social connections children in

care create with supportive people in their lives, such as foster parents. These connections

can be described as supportive and caring or detached and uninvolved. Zinn, Palmer and

Nam (2017) completed research to understand the dynamic of connections and social

supports for former foster youths. They completed a survey with 732 former foster

youths, and found that social connections to foster parents, family, mentors, and romantic

partners played a role in attachment and security, as well as stability. Also, youths that

perceived higher levels of social support transitioned into adulthood more successfully.

Because foster parents have daily contact with youths in their care, they play a vital role

in supporting the youths and helping them feel connected and secure, which can impact

the stability of their placement and lead to better outcomes for the youths over time. Zinn

et al. (2017) did not include interviews with foster parents in their research, which could

have broadened the understanding of stability, connections, and attachments from the

caregiver's perspective, which could have added to the overall understanding of the foster

care experience for both youths and foster parents, which could ultimately provide a path

to placement stability in the future.

　　　　Koh et al. (2014) completed a seminal quantitative research study to understand

what factors play a role in placement instability by comparing youths over time in both

stable and unstable placements. Using data obtained from the Illinois child welfare

system, themes emerged for youths that weren't experiencing stability in their

placements. Connection to caregivers, child welfare systems that include the court process, and child-related symptomology and behaviors were all related to placement instability. Further, children who do not have mental health diagnoses experience less placement disruptions, and children who are placed with relative caregivers also experience less placement disruptions. Education, training, and increased support for foster parents all seemed to play a critical role in promoting placement stability for youths in care across the board, regardless of child related factors. Also, when caregivers were committed to supporting legal permanence (i.e. adoption of the child), placement stability was more likely. These are important findings, as it demonstrates the important role that foster parents have in caring for youths that have been removed from their home, especially when they have the right training, support and commitment to the children in their care. Koh et al. (2014) did not interview foster parents as a part of their research, which could have allowed for deeper understanding as to what foster parents felt they needed in regards to training and support that could lead to improved commitment to children placed in their home, as well as placement stability.

Bernedo et al (2016) also completed a quantitative research study on factors that are related to placement stability for non-relative caregivers in Spain, and two important findings emerged. The first was that the age of the child, specifically older children, experienced greater instability in their placements, but they also found that the emotional connection to and relationship between foster parent and youths impacted stability. As expected, when youths have poor relationships and little communication with their foster parents, disruption is placement occurs. However, when youths have a connection to their

foster parent that includes communication and commitment, placements are stable. This

is an important finding to note, as it speaks to the importance of the relationship dynamic

between the foster parent and the youths, as well how attachment between caregiver and

child can improve placement outcomes. Bernedo et al. (2016) suggested that further

examination of this relationship through a qualitative lens from a foster parent or youth's

perspective could provide information that could support stability in placement for youths

in foster care. Bernedo et al. (2016) completed research in Spain and the laws and

policies that govern child welfare agencies and foster parents is different than those found

in other areas of the world, so it would be important to expand their research to other

areas to see if there are differences and/or commonalities in other areas of the world. This

would also provide them the opportunity to gain more insight on the relationship between

foster parents and youth. The voice of the youth and foster parent is extremely important

in current research, as these groups have first-hand knowledge of what works and what

does not work in out-of-home placements. The youth's voice and perspective of

placement disruptions is quite valuable, as they can speak to both the experience and the

outcomes they face when they aren't able to experience secure attachments and

placement stability.

Placement Disruptions: Youth Perspective

One of the most important voices to be heard in regards to the impacts of

placement instability in foster care is the youth's voice, and there are very few studies

that have completed research to understand the impact of placement disruption from the

youth's perspective. Nybell (2013) shares that many child welfare agencies are making

efforts to include the "voice" of youths, so they can speak to the matters that impact them most in foster care because historically the voice of the youths has been muted, distorted or even amplified with little to no context. The youths must have a voice in how the foster care system and placement disruptions has impacted their lives, as this can be the motivation for change (Nybell, 2013).

Chambers et al. (2017) interviewed youths that experienced multiple foster placements to see how the youths would define placement moves. The responses indicate that youths consider a number of things when a placement becomes unstable – how much time they have been in the current placement and what the relationship is like with the current caregiver, having to pack and leave, losing property that was important to them, the hope or even the fear of returning home to their biological parents, what type of placement will be next, and what role, if any, they get to play in the decision making process as to where they will be placed next (Chambers et al., 2017). At times, these decisions are all made without the youths having any voice or say in where they will be placed next, so essentially they have no voice or say in what has happened or will happen. The trauma associated with multiple moves for youths in care, especially when they have been stripped of their own voice can cause great suffering and be a catalyst for mental health struggles and other at-risk behaviors (Nybell, 2013).

Unrau et al. (2008) completed research with adults that had aged out of foster care and interviewed them about the impacts of placement disruptions – a very common theme was found. They reported feeling significant loss and grief due to placement disruptions; and they experienced emotional instability and had guarded optimism about

the likelihood of placement stability at their next placement. It is difficult for youths in this situation, as they continue to experience disruptions and struggled to find secure attachments with caregivers (Prather & Golden, 2009). The lack of trust and guarded optimism being reported by the youth is likely related to the lack of secure attachments they experienced with caregivers in their differing placements. The youths unanimously reported that they struggled with trust issues even as they aged out of the child welfare system and became adults. Research findings have shown that placement instability undermines the structure and consistency that children need to have to feel safe and secure so that they can flourish and realize success in their lives (Villodas, et al., 2016). Research from the youth's perspective is meaningful and important and provides the significant motivation to find answers and provide stability for these vulnerable youths. From the moment youths are placed into care, they are introduced to a number of adults who want to "help" them – social workers, providers, Guardian ad Litems or CASAs, judges, and foster parents. To help these youths, researchers have noted that it is important to empower them to have their own voice and be a part of the decision-making process (Nybel, 2013). Foster parents have daily contact with youths placed in their homes, which is much more contact than anyone else involved does, so they play a very important role when it comes to creating healthy attachments, secure connections, and supporting youths to find their voice and advocate for their own best interest.

Placement Disruptions: Federal Government

The federal government heard the voice of youths in foster care regarding the negative impacts of multiple placement move, and they have placed child welfare

agencies under intense scrutiny and are demanding focused attention to address

placement instability in all states (Blakely et al., 2012). In one of the first federal reviews

to focus on placement disruptions, multiple child welfare workers, supervisors, managers,

and foster parents were interviewed in 33 states to see what processes were being

implemented to improve placement stability (Blakely et al., 2012). They found that states

are implementing several strategies – better services for youths, placement-matching with

youths to potential foster homes upon initial placement, a focus on foster parent

recruitment efforts, more service and supports for caregivers, more training, consultation,

and collaboration with a team approach that includes all parties involved in the decision

making, more involvement with biological parents, and prevention efforts to avoid

children being brought into care (Blakely et al., 2012).

Out of this review process, the federal government has made some very specific

suggestions about ways to mitigate placement instability – providing additional supports

and education for foster parents and youth in foster care, to include CASAs that work to

ensure children's needs are being met, and greater supports for any caregivers who are

working to achieve permanence for children in their care (Carnochan, Moore, & Austin,

2013). There has been no research dedicated to evaluate the effectiveness of CASA's in

the court process, but from a common sense standpoint, it seems that having a CASA

completing an individual assessment to speak to the youth's best interest would be

beneficial in decision making related to placement stability. The federal government has

laid the foundation and continues to keep placement stability at the forefront of federal

reviews with child welfare agencies to ensure that states agencies are achieving stability

for youths in care, which provides great motivation for positive social change. It is clear that foster parents are essential when it comes to stability, which is why the current research study focused on understanding the lived experience of foster parents and what they feel they need to ensure placement stability for the youths they care for in their homes.

Placement Disruptions: Foster Parent Perspective

Foster parents play a vital role in the lives of the youths they take into their homes and previous research studies have demonstrated that there are a number of factors that play a role in placement disruptions, such as the behavior of the youths, foster parent experience, and the level of support foster parents receive from the child welfare system (Leathers et al., 2019; Solomon et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). In an attempt to further understand some of the factors associated with placement disruptions and challenging parenting experience, Leathers et al. (2019) completed a mixed method research study using 139 foster parents who care for children between the ages of 8 and 14 who have experienced at least two placement disruptions in their research. The foster parents completed a 90-minute interview where they were asked a few questions in regards to how many placement disruptions they have had as well as what supports they have. They were also asked to complete measures on the children's behavior, their perceptions of the child's needs, and parenting experiences. The results indicated that children that struggled with difficult behaviors, presented a risk to others, felt a lack of support from foster parents, and experienced high levels of stress were all factors that led

to foster parents having challenging parenting experiences, which in turn often led to placement disruptions.

Lack of support for foster parents, poor foster parent experiences with placements, and education and training to prepare foster parents to care for youths with trauma histories present real problems in the foster care system, and these factors often lead to placement disruptions (Leathers et al., 2019; Solomon et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). It would have been interesting to understand more about these factors from the foster parent perspective. Leathers et al. (2019) used measures in their study that didn't allow foster parents to provide specific information around their experience with placement disruptions or talk in detail about what supports or training they feel they need, or to talk about the stress they feel in caring for children with challenging behaviors. This information could have provided a more in-depth understanding of the foster parent's experience and created a platform for potential change that might impact placement disruptions. As Solomon et al. (2019) found, support, or lack thereof, is one of the leading predictors of placement disruptions. Education and training continue to play a role in placement disruptions for youth in care as well (Solomon et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

Foster parent training and education is a topic that is covered well in research on placement disruptions (Solomon et al., 2017). Foster parents are tasked with a very difficult job in caring for youth with traumatic histories and often times behaviors that are difficult to manage that are related to those histories (Solomon et al., 2017). Appropriate education and foster parent training play a significant role in mitigating placement

disruptions, especially for children with behavior and emotional struggles. Solomon et al. (2017) completed a meta-analysis of foster parent training research to gain further understanding of the impact that training actually has for foster parents. They reviewed 16 studies from 1984 to 2014 that specifically focused on foster parent's self-report on training when they have children with problem behaviors in their care. Solomon et al. (2017) found that on average foster parents that had training reported fewer child behavior problems, and they also reported higher levels of skills, abilities, and knowledge when compared to foster parents that didn't have training. Foster parent training and education remains an on-going focus in research on placement disruptions because previous research has demonstrated that training allows foster parents to feel more prepared and confident in their role as a caregiver.

Taylor and McQuillan (2014) completed one of the only research studies that focused on the perspectives of both social workers and fosters parents in relation to placement disruptions to understand the main concerns and issues related to placement disruptions. They sent out questionnaires that had both quantitative and qualitative questions to social worker supervisors, social workers, and foster parents who were involved in 36 placement disruptions that occurred in Northern Ireland from 2009 to 2011. They found that some of the main concerns for foster parents in regards to placement disruptions were child behaviors, lack of contact with and support from social workers, contact with birth parents that was disruptive, and not being heard by social workers or others that play a role in making placement decisions. These are important findings, as it speaks directly to what foster parents believe impacts stability in

placements. Challenging behaviors were also noted as a factor that played a significant role in placement disruptions by Solomon et al. (2017), but there was not much information presented in regards to what those behaviors were and what foster parents might need to support children with challenging behaviors. Youths that enter out-of-home placements have traumatic experiences from their past and struggle with loss of attachments and trying to create new attachments with foster parents, so it is common that they might display challenging behaviors (Biehal, 2014). To provide further understanding from the foster parents' perspective, Solomon et al. (2019) could have asked more questions to find out what foster parents think about challenging behaviors and how to manage them in their homes, as well as how attached foster parents are to children and if those attachments are more difficult with children that present with challenging behaviors. It would have also been interesting to get more insight from foster parents about their experience and knowledge in caring for youths and what they believe might support placement stability.

Foster parents have very important information when it comes to the youths that are placed in their homes and they need to be viewed and valued as experts. With the right training, education, and support, foster parents felt that they could maintain placements even when children struggle with behavioral concerns (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Foster parents want to be valued, respected and educated on the best ways to care for the children in their home, so they are able to remain committed and can feel successful in their roles as caregivers. Foster parents create attachments to the youths

they care for in their home, and they are invested in caring for these children, so it is vital that they are given education, support, and respect (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

Placement Disruptions and Attachment

Developing a sense of belonging and attachment is something that youths being removed from their biological parents and placed in out-of-home care have to deal with on an on-going basis (Biehal, 2014). There are very few current studies that focus on attachment and placement disruptions, so the most current and relevant research studies will be reviewed. These youths experience significant loss when it comes to their biological families and placement disruptions, and they often struggle to maintain a sense of who they are and where they belong (Biehal, 2014). Belonging and attachment play a very important role in maintaining placements and helping youth feel secure in their connections to both their biological family and their foster parents. Biehal (2014) completed a qualitative study to develop understanding around belonging, attachment, and family identity with 196 youths that had been in a placement for more than 3 years. Through the use of semi-structured interviews with both youths and foster parents, Biehal (2014) found that youths view belonging in different ways. Some of the youths in the study were able to feel connected to their foster parents knowing that they might someday get to see their biological parents, others understood that they have two families (biological and foster parents) and feel that they belong in both, and some felt anger and resentment to their birth parents and more connected to their foster parents. For all of the children, connection and a sense of belonging was an important theme and it impacted their ability to feel secure in their out-of-home placements (Biehal, 2014).

Foster parent attitudes in regards to commitment and belonging can also have a significant impact on maintaining placements where children feel secure. Focusing on a group of foster parents that experienced successful placements, Oke et al. (2011) completed a qualitative research study using semi-structured interviews with seven foster parents who had maintained successful long-term placements. The researchers hope was to gain understanding, from a foster parent's perspective, about how they view a child's connection and belonging to both a birth family and a foster family. Four major themes emerged – these foster parents were emotionally bonded and viewed the foster child as their own child and extended the idea of family to include the child's birth families, they worked successfully within the system to get the children's needs met and maintain connection to biological families, they were interested in crafting a safe relationship between the child and their birth family, and they stuck with it no matter what and maintained hope. Children need to maintain a connection and attachment with their biological families. Foster parents that are able to support children to remain connected to their biological families while working on their own emotional connection and commitment to the child has a significant impact on the child's overall well-being, and also on successful long-term placement stability (Oke et al., 2011). This theme of connection and finding a narrative that incorporates both biological and birth families demonstrates clearly how important the idea of attachment is when it comes to youths being placed in out-of-home care.

Children in foster care are vulnerable to a variety of negative outcomes, even when being removed from harmful situations and placed with foster parents that care a

great deal about the youths placed in their care (Davies & Hodges, 2017). Attachments plays a vital role with children placed in out-of-home care because their attachments become disrupted with their biological family, and this impact their ability to connect with new caregivers, which then can have a significant impact on placement stability (Davies & Hodges, 2017). The need for therapeutic treatments aimed at dealing with disrupted attachments for youths in foster care is important. Davies and Hodges (2017) suggest in their research to use attachment-based narratives and metaphor in creating life stories in therapy with children that have been removed from their home, as this can be a useful tool to support youths in understanding their trauma history in relationship to their biological families. Life story work with children in care has long been used to support connection between biological families and foster parents, as it allows children to merge their past with their present and feel more comfortable about their future (Shotton, 2013).

David and Hodges (2017) reviewed two case study examples that demonstrated the use of therapeutic treatment using the attachment-based narrative approach, which helped the children connect with their trauma history in a safe space, while also allowing them remain connected to their biological families and understand how to move forward with their foster parents. In both of these cases, it appeared that the children were able to successfully work through their difficult histories and find some resolve around the disrupted attachments with biological families, which will hopefully allow them to find security in their foster homes as they develop a new narrative of attachment. The research on attachment and out-of-home placement make it clear that connection and security must be attended to in a sensitive manner for youths because it has a direct impact on

placement stability (Biehal, 2014). Current research has not focused on the theme of attachment and placement disruptions from the perspective of foster parents who play a critical role in creating security for youth in out-of-home care, which is why the current research study aims to understand the attachment from a foster parent's perspective in relationship to placement disruption.

Short- and Long-Term Impact of Placement Disruptions for Foster Parents

There is not a great deal of research on the impacts of placement disruptions for foster parents, as this group has not had a very large voice in research. Foster parent retention has been the focus of current research (Ahn et al., 2017), and the theme of not feeling supported or heard in the process that leads to placement disruptions has also been researched (Tonheim & Iversen, 2018).

In their research with 132 Norwegian foster parents who have experienced placement disruptions, Tonheim and Iversen (2018) found that foster parents do not feel supported or heard by child welfare social workers who are making decisions about placement disruptions. This, coupled with difficult child behaviors, impacts on foster parent's biological children, and a discrepancy between the child's behavior and foster parent's capabilities, all directly impacted placement disruptions and the foster parents' willingness to continue to be a caregiver. There is not a great deal of research that focuses on the impact of placement disruptions on biological children in foster homes, but this is certainly an area that should be researched more in the future, as it may provide further understanding of the lived experience of foster parents that have dealt with placement disruptions. Foster parents are tasked with enormous responsibility when it comes to

caring for children with trauma histories and they are impacted when children are placed in their home in a number of ways, but they are also impacted in the long-term as to whether they want to continue to be foster parents, which is typically based on their experience, positive or negative (Ahn et al., 2017). Foster parents are also impacted by grief and loss when they are trying to care for a child and a placement disrupts, and they feel they have had little say in the matter (Tonheim & Iversen, 2018).

After creating an attachment with a child, it makes the loss that comes with placement disruption even more difficult and sometimes even impacts whether foster parents will continue with placements in the future. While Tonheim and Iversen (2018) demonstrate a theme of foster parents not being heard in their research, it would have been good to gain further insight about what needs to occur so that foster parents can be more a part of the decision-making process when it comes to placement decisions, what supports they feel they need, and what they feel might impact placement stability in the future. Tonheim and Iversen (2018) also used Norwegian foster parents, and it would be interesting to see if their findings would be similar across cultures and in different areas of the world. While there is not a great deal of current research on the short- and long-term impacts of placement disruptions for foster parents, there is a great deal of research for youths who are impacted by placement disruptions.

Short- and Long-Term Impacts of Placement Disruptions for Youths

As previously described, youths who have been removed from their biological parents have trauma histories and have to deal with grief and loss that immediately impact their emotional, social and mental well-being. The removal and separation from

biological families alone creates trauma in and of itself for a child (Biehal, 2014).

Fontanella et al. (2015) completed research on the need for continuity of care for children

with emotional disturbances that are placed in out-of-home care, and state that placement

disruptions are one of the major obstacles to children getting the care they need. Children

in care who have been impacted by their trauma histories and removal from their

biological parents need mental health support immediately and consistently, which is

lacking in the current state of foster care and placement disruptions exacerbate this

problem (Fontanella et al., 2015). As previously described in the research above,

attachments are disrupted when children come into care, which also has a significant

negative impact on the overall well-being.

Long term negative impacts of children in care has also been extensively

researched over the years (Epstein, et al., 2015; Rock, et al., 2015; Villodas, et al., 2016).

Zinn et al. (2017) completed research on the perceived social support among foster

youths who have aged out of the system, and they found that delinquency and attachment

insecurity were related to the youth's perception of social support from foster parents,

biological parents, and formal institutions. Youths in care that don't perceive support

from those around them and experience placement disruptions are placed at a great

disadvantage and often struggle with emotional difficulties, attachment insecurity, mental

health struggles, substance and alcohol abuse, and criminal behavior (Rock, et al., 2015).

Because the negative impacts for youths who age out of foster care is so significant, the

currently proposed research study is focused on the foster parent's experience with

placement disruptions in order to gain further insight and understanding on what might

mitigate placement disruptions in hopes to create positive social change for this vulnerable population.

Strategies for Placement Stability in Foster Care

Placement stability for youths placed in out-of-home care is critical to their immediate and long-term well-being and making placement decisions that match children with perspective foster parents has been cited in research to have an impact on placement stability (Epstein et al., 2015). Moore et al. (2016) completed research using an assessment tool that is a piece of a web-based program that supports matching children with foster parents who have the skills and ability to care for the children with differing levels of behaviors and risk factors. They found that when children were placed in homes where foster parent's experience and ability matched the level of risk with the level of care needed, placement stability was more likely. They also note that quick decisions have to be made in regards to placement when children are brought into care, so it is at times difficult during initial placement to take the time to assess risk and level of care needs, as there is a lot of information that is unknown. However, if more focus were placed on finding out ways to determine the level of risk factors and care needs of youths in order to place them in foster parents that might be able to manage those risk and levels of care, it seems it is worth taking time to gather the information needed to make a good placement decision. Further research needs to occur on idea of assessing the level of risk and care needs for youth in order to match children with appropriate foster parents, as this could potentially allow from better placement decisions and lead to placement stability. Foster parents have a wealth of knowledge, and they could provide specific details from

their own experience about what experience is needed to address risk factor and level of care needs for the children placed in their homes.

Another strategy that has been implemented to support in placement stability is improved education and training for foster parents. Madigan et al. (2017) completed research to evaluate the "Solihull Approach" course for foster parents. This approach to foster care places emphasis on the parent and child relationship by highlighting children's need for emotional support and reciprocal relationship to support foster parents in managing difficult behaviors (Madigan et al., 2017). Research was completed with 83 foster parents who went through the 12-week training program that helped foster parents focus on understanding their foster child's behavior. The researchers found that foster parents thought the most important elements of the training were taking time to think about the foster child to understand their trauma, reciprocity in relationship, communication and play, containment, and the ability to take a break or receive respite when feeling overwhelmed. They also found that when foster parents completed this course it helped clarify the relationship they have with their foster child, help them understand their past trauma in relationship to their current placement, and clarification of their role as a foster parent all led to better outcomes and placement stability. It would appear that this type of training and some level of assessment to match children with foster parents both show promise in mitigating placement disruptions, but further research is needed, as placement instability continues to be an obstacle for children in out-of-home placements.

Research Methodology Tradition

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allows for an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of participants in a specific context and setting, and participants can provide detailed descriptions of a given phenomenon from their own personal experience (Smith et al.,2012). IPA was used in the current study to understand the lived experiences of placement disruptions from the foster parent's perspective because the voice of foster parents is not prominent in current research. The use of IPA allowed for greater understanding of placement disruptions from the foster parent's perspective, as well as ways to mitigate placement disruptions in the future. While there isn't previous research that uses IPA to understand the lived experience of placement disruptions from the foster parent's perspective, IPA has been used in research with foster parents and social workers.

Using IPA, Jaggar (2018) completed research on how social workers perform their role in supervising and supporting the foster parents they work with. Participants included five social workers in a focus group setting from the East Midlands region of the United Kingdom. The social workers shared their experience, attitudes and beliefs regarding their role in supporting and supervising foster parents. The researcher positioned herself as part of the research system and led group discussion using open ended questions to elicit responses from the participants. Using this research methodology, themes emerged with the social worker's responses, which included social worker's discomfort when there was a disconnect between agency policy and practice and their own beliefs and values in the way they work with foster parents, and conversely

social workers reported feeling satisfaction when agency policy and practice matched their own morals and values in their work with foster parents.

It is interesting that Jaggar used a focus group instead of doing individual interviews, as the results of the interviews could be impacted by group thinking, which is why individual interviews were completed with foster parents in the current study. However, IPA allowed for the use of open ended questions that can elicit responses that provide context and deeper understanding of the social worker's lived experience in their work with foster parents and demonstrates why IPA will be an applicable research methodology for the current research study, as it allows for both a means to gather data more in-depth and meaningful data, as well as a way to analyze the data thoroughly.

Shotton (2013) also used IPA in her research on the positive impacts of life story work with children placed in out-of-home care. Life story work has been demonstrated in previous research to be a very helpful and supportive activity for children, as it allows them to remember and document their life story, which includes their time in foster care or other types of out-of-home placements (Shotton, 2013). Five foster parents and four youths were interviewed about their use of the memory store approach, which gets the child involved in communicating about and reflecting on their life experiences and recording it through the use of stories and photographs that they place in a memory store (i.e. a book for box). Overall, the participants all reported positive benefits from using the memory store approach, especially in relation to the youths having a more positive self-perception when they are able to think about their relationships and the emotions attached to those relationships in a safe setting where they can remember the things that have

happened to them in their lives. This research provides another example of the usefulness of IPA to both gain further insight and understanding of the lived experience of a given phenomenon, and a manner in which to analyze that data in a meaningful way.

Summary and Conclusions

Overall, previous research has documented the long-term negative impacts that placement disruptions have on youth placed in out-of-home care (Epstein, et al., 2015; Rock, et al., 2015; Villodas, et al., 2016). This research has included attempts at understanding the youth's perspective, as well as the perspective of foster parents and social workers through a quantitative lens (Bernedo et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Much of the research has also demonstrated the important role that foster parents play, due to their daily contact with the youth and expertise when it comes to caring for children that have been placed in their home (Leathers et al., 2019). Their insight and experience with placement disruptions could provide valuable information about why placement disruptions occur, which in turn may yield information as to what might help to mitigate placement disruptions.

Unfortunately, there was no research that focused solely on the voice of foster parents to assess their vast experience and knowledge of placement disruptions, which is how the current study helped fill a gap in literature by focusing on the foster parent's experience with placement disruptions through a qualitative lens. Previous research has queried foster parents through questionnaires, but this does not allow foster parents to share their complete understanding and experience, and current research needs to use a qualitative lens to provide a more in-depth understanding of placement disruptions from

the foster parents perspective (Bernedo et al., 2016). The next chapter will discuss the methodology, setting, sample, instrumentation, and analysis that was used in the current study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience of foster parents with regard to placement disruptions and how attachment may impact placement disruptions from the perspective of foster parents. In this study, foster parents had the opportunity to describe the major contributing experiences that led to placement disruptions, and what could have been helpful to mitigate the placement disruptions they experienced. I also explored what foster parents described as helpful for future efforts to maintain placements for children placed in out-of-home care. Foster parents also discussed the aspects of their experience with attachment with the youths placed in their home and how that may or may not have impacted placement disruptions. A deeper and more meaningful understanding from foster parents provided a more contextual understanding of the challenges the foster children face, and created opportunities to discuss potential changes that are needed to mitigate placement disruptions (see Bernedo et al., 2016).

Research Design and Rationale

There were two research questions in this study, and they were developed to obtain an understanding of the attachments foster parents create with the children placed in their home, and the lived experience of placement disruptions for foster parents to provide a deeper understanding of the central problem and potential solutions to address placement disruptions in the future. The research questions were the following:

RQ1: What is the lived experience of placement disruptions for foster parents?

RQ2: How do foster parents experience attachments with foster children?

Central Phenomenon of the Study

The central concepts in the current study were placement disruptions for youths placed in out-of-home care, specifically in the care of foster parents; how attachment plays a role in disruptions or potential solutions; and what foster parents feel they need to attain stability in placements in the future. I defined foster parents as individuals who are licensed and approved by the state of Washington to provide care for children who have been removed from their biological parents and are in the custody of the State of Washington's Child Welfare System. Placement disruptions were defined as any moves or changes in placement for children who have been placed in out-of-home care in the State of Washington. Lastly, attachment referred to Bowlby's (1988) definition of attachment, which is a deep and enduring connection and/or bond between two people, typically a caregiver and child.

Research Tradition

The nature of the current study was qualitative using IPA. This type of research is used to understand how participants makes sense out of their personal and social worlds and the meaning they ascribe to particular lived experiences (Smith et al., 2012). IPA is a two-stage interpretation process in which participants try make sense of their personal experiences and researchers attempt to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their personal experiences (Smith et al., 2012). When using IPA, researchers attempt to understand the subjective meaning described by the participants, and then work to find common themes or ideas found in the participants' reports. To ensure accuracy, the researchers then verify with the participants that the interpretations are

correct (Smith et al., 2012). IPA allows the focus to be on participants' lived experience, thoughts, and interpretations of a given phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In the current study, the central phenomenon was placement disruptions.

Rationale

Previous researchers have used the qualitative tradition when working to gain understanding about placement disruptions for children in foster care (Chambers et al., 2017) because the qualitative method allowed for a more in-depth understanding of placement disruptions. Qualitative research allows participants to have a voice in the research, which allows for greater understanding of individual differences and similarities. Quantitative research is focused on statistical inquiry and is designed to produce results that are generalizable to the larger population, while qualitative researchers seek to break new ground in research and provide a foundation for new learning and development of concepts, ideas, and theories that are transferable (Creswell, 2007).

Because placement disruptions for youths in out-of-home care are complex events that many foster parents have experienced, I determined that foster parents should have the opportunity to provide details of their experience with placement disruptions, which would allow for a more contextual understanding of placement disruptions and lay a foundation for what foster parents feel is needed to achieve placement stability in the future. This inquiry into placement disruptions was conducted through a qualitative approach using a phenomenological design. Because there was not much known about

this topic, a qualitative study provided a more in-depth understanding through emerging themes from a purposeful sample of foster parents.

IPA allows for a deeper understanding of the lived experience of participants in a specific context and setting, and it allows participants to provide detailed descriptions of their experience with a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2012). IPA is designed to address participants' understanding of a given phenomenon from their experience (Smith et al., 2012). This research tradition was appropriate for the current study because it allowed for further understanding of the lived experience of placement disruptions from the foster parents' perspective.

Creswell (2007) shared that there are multiple qualitative strategies of inquiry, which include case study, grounded theory, biography, and ethnographic research, but none of these approaches were suitable for the current study on placement disruptions. Case study research allows for an in-depth study of a specific system using data-gathering techniques to understand the system's context within the greater system (Creswell, 2007). Although this approach allows for a more in-depth understanding of a system, it does not provide greater context of the underlying meanings as well as IPA does. Grounded theory research is conducted to develop new theory (Creswell, 2007), but the current study was conducted to generate new understanding, not a new theory; therefore, the grounded theory approach was not suitable for the current study on placement disruptions. Biography research focuses on narratives over a period of time to describe an experience, but it does not allow for an in-depth understanding or underlying meaning of a central problem (Creswell, 2007). Lastly, ethnographic research focuses on

observation of a social group as opposed to in-depth narratives of lived experiences (Creswell, 2007), which is why it is not appropriate for the current study. A phenomenological approach was the most appropriate choice to understand the lived experience of placement disruptions from the perspective of foster parents.

Role of the Researcher

I was the sole researcher for the current study; therefore, I was the main instrument for data collection through the use of semi-structured interviews, as is the tradition in IPA (see Smith et al., 2012). I completed audio-recorded interviews by phone or online with all participants so I could review and analyze all data that were gathered during the interviewing process, which followed the tradition of IPA (see Smith et al., 2012).

Although I had no personal or professional relationship with the foster parents who were selected as participants in the current study, I am a supervisor at Child Protective Services in Bellingham, WA, and I supervise a unit of social workers who complete assessments and investigations of alleged abuse and neglect by biological parents. My contact with foster parents is minimal, but there could have been a perceived power dynamic by foster parents in the current study due to the fact that the children who have been removed from biological parents in the office where I work are placed with foster parents. To address this dynamic, I was transparent about my professional role at Child Protective Services and my role as a doctoral researcher and not a social worker in the current study. I also ensured that each participant reviewed recruitment documents

and the informed consent form, which indicated that their identity and data would be kept confidential.

The role of a qualitative researcher involves direct interactions with participants to obtain a more in-depth understanding of their experiences (McCaslin& Scott, 2003). For the current study, I interacted with foster parents to gain insight and understanding of their lived experience with placement disruptions. Because I work in a field that is impacted by placement disruptions and have some strong opinions about the impact they have on youths in the custody of the state, it was important to acknowledge those strong feelings to myself and manage them so they did not impact the quality of the interviews or the outcome of the study. It was important to manage any potential bias so I could step back and objectively listen to the interviews and interpret them correctly. I kept a journal to keep track of my personal thoughts or feelings as I completed interviews and analyzed data to ensure that I was preventing any bias from impeding an objective review of the data. I also checked in regularly with my chair to discuss and process any potential bias that occurred, and I ensured that foster parents who were selected as participants in the current study were not foster parents of cases that I had supervised in my professional role at Child Protective Services.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

As is the tradition of IPA, a homogenous sample was used for the current study (see Smith et al., 2012). The use of homogenous sampling ensures the sample includes participants who share certain characteristics and traits, in particular the life experience

addressed in the study (Smith et al., 2012). In the current study, there were certain criteria used to determine eligibility to participate. Participants had to be foster parents who were licensed and approved for child placements in the State of Washington, and the foster parents must have been foster parents for at least 1 year and had experienced at least three placement disruptions with children placed in their home since becoming licensed. The criteria were confirmed via participants' self-reported confirmation of a home study approval, foster parent license, and placement disruptions. Foster parents who had placement of children whom I had supervised in my role as a supervisor at Child Protective Services were excluded as participants.

Participants were identified and interviewed until data saturation occurred. Saturation is achieved when the data that come from the interviews begin to reveal the same general pattern and ideas, and no new information or themes are being observed (Saunders et al., 2018). Smith et al. (2012) shared that having more participants does not necessarily lead to more meaningful results, and having too many participants can overwhelm the researcher and not provide additional patterns, which is why participants were interviewed until saturation occurred. In the tradition of IPA, the number of participants can range from two to 25 (Miller et al., 2018). For the current study, saturation was met with the sixth participant.

Instrumentation

Data were collected by phone or virtual semi-structured interviews that were recorded with the consent of each participant. Semi-structured interviews are an established data collection instrument in qualitative research when answering

phenomenological research questions (Creswell, 2007). The audio recordings were used for data analysis, as is the tradition of IPA (see Smith et al., 2012).

Current research on placement disruptions informed the decision making regarding appropriate interview questions for the semi-structured interviews with participants. The semi-structured interview process was consistent with the format suggested by Smith et al. (2012) for IPA, which includes taking the time to build rapport with the participant at the beginning of the interview, the use of open-ended questions, and flexibility within the interviews to allow the participants to discuss their lived experience fully.

Interview Questions

Initially I addressed participants' age, gender, how long they had been fostering, how many children they had in placements, and how many placement disruptions they had experienced. The research question that addressed the lived experience of placement disruption for foster parents was answered using the following interview questions:

1. Please tell me about your experience with placement disruptions.

2. In your experience, what were the biggest obstacles in maintaining a placement?

3. What supports did you have to help maintain placement of the youths placed in your home?

4. In your experience as a foster parent, what additional supports or ideas do you have that would be helpful in maintaining placements in the future?

The research question that addressed how foster parents described the narrative of attachment was answered using the following interview questions:

1. How do you define attachment? (Researcher will be prepared to provide a definition, if needed).

2. What is your experience creating attachments with the youths placed in your home?

3. In your experience as a foster parent, how do you feel attachment impacts placement?

4. How do you feel previous trauma impacts attachment with the youths who have been placed in your home?

5. What do you believe foster youths need in order to feel connected to you as their caregiver?

6. What do you feel you need to know from other sources (e.g., social workers, training, or education) to create a connection and a bond with a youth placed in your home?

Content validity was established in the current study because each interview question was directly related to one of the research questions. Smith et al. (2012) shared that the flexibility in semi-structured interviewing ensures that the data collection instrument is able to answer the phenomenological research questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

For this study, data were gathered using semi-structured interviews conducted by phone or online with foster parents who were recruited through a foster parent group in

Washington State. The director provided approval to solicit licensed foster parents who had at least 1 year of experience with the State of Washington and who had experienced at least three placement disruptions. Prospective participants were provided with an informed consent document explaining the nature of the study and their rights as participants.

As the researcher, I conducted semi-structured interviews by phone or online, which were scheduled for an hour. All interviews were audio recorded, so they could be transcribed to use in the data analysis process. At the conclusion of the interview all participants were provided a debriefing form (see Appendix C) where they were reminded of the purpose of the study and the use of the data that was collected in the interviews. The debriefing form also provided the participants with the opportunity to ask any follow up questions they had about the study, data analysis, and/or publication procedures. The foster parents were provided with contact information for this researcher in the event they had any further questions, and they were also provided with support contacts in the event that their participation in the study caused them any distress.

Follow up interviews were not required for the purpose of the current study. However, member-checking was used with each participant to ensure accuracy of the interviews and research summaries and to allow the participants to add any additional information, if needed. Member-checking improves accuracy and credibility in qualitative research, as well as allows the opportunity to clarify information provided by the participants in the interview process (Chang, 2014).

Data Analysis Plan

Data collection was solely focused on the semi-structured interview questions that were created to answer the research questions. The procedure for data coding, as defined by Smith et al. (2012), will be used to analyze the data. Following the IPA analysis and coding procedure, described by Smith et al, (2012), each participant's interview was analyzed as a single and complete data set. There are six steps in the process of analyzing and coding the data sets, and the first five steps will focus on each single participant interview, and the last step allows for analysis of the relationship between the participant interviews.

The first step of the process involves the researcher becoming immersed with the data (Smith et al., 2012). This basically means reading each participant interview numerous times, which allows the researcher to enter the world of the participants to gain further understanding of their lived experience as much as possible, while ensuring the participant is the focus of the analysis.

The second step is to take descriptive notes on each of the transcripts of the participant interviews. This allows the researcher an opportunity to examine both the language and meaning in each transcript. The researcher should take descriptive notes based on the semantic content, as well as the word choices of each participant (Smith et al., 2012).

The third step as described by Smith et al. (2012) is to identify any themes that might emerge in the transcripts. The researcher reviews all the descriptive notes to identify themes that directly relate to the lived experience of each of the participants. In

the tradition of IPA, each interview needs to be analyzed separately before exploring any themes that might emerge across all participant interviews (Smith et al. 2012).

The fourth step is to examine connections between the themes that have been identified. There are several strategies that can be used to find connections (Smith et al., 2012). Abstraction will be used to cluster similar themes to identify any emerging themes that are present in the transcript. Numeration will be used to identify the frequency by which themes emerge throughout the transcript. Contextualization will be used to highlight contextual themes related to the lived experience of placement disruptions, and lastly function will be used to identify any positive or negative themes within the transcripts. All of these strategies will be employed to map and connect themes in the analysis process.

The fifth step in the process to is to repeat steps one through four with each of the remaining interview transcripts. As in the tradition of IPA, each participant interview will be analyzed thoroughly and individually, as is described above in the first four steps (Smith et al., 2012).

According to Smith et al. (2012), the sixth and last step in the process will be to identify patterns across all of the interviews by analyzing each of the participant's interviews to see how they relate to one another. A table of themes with be created and used to identify how each theme is related to the other.

There was no software used in the analysis process for the study. Discrepant cases were included in the study and are discussed in detail as a part of the data analysis process in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, it is important to establish trustworthiness, as this is what measures the value and worth of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers must establish credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability in order to ensure trustworthiness of their research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the current study, trustworthiness was established using differing methods, which will include, triangulation, prolonged engagement, member-checking, reflexivity through reflexive journaling, thick description and an audit trail. These methods will be discussed in more detail below and will demonstrate the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, of the proposed research.

Credibility

Credibility is one of the most vital criteria to establish trustworthiness in research, as it ensures a clear link between the findings in a research study and the reality of what was reported in participant interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants should be able to recognize their own lived experience as truthful in the research findings, as this ensures the study is credible, and there are a number of methods that can be used to increase credibility in research. For the purpose of this study, the methods that were used are prolonged engagement, member checks, triangulation, and external audits.

Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement refers to the researcher investing sufficient time to become familiar with the population, build trust with the participants, and test for any biases that might be present for the researcher or the participant (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Researchers are responsible for knowing the population and building rapport with participants, as this will help to detect any distortions that might be present so they can be attended to (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). For the current study, I spoke with the foster parent forum manager prior to the interviews to get a better understanding of the group, and I will also spoke with participants prior to the interview to build a rapport.

Member Checks

Member checking is used to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the participant interviews, and this accomplished by checking with the participants, so they can review the work and provide feedback (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). For the current study, once the data analysis process was complete and themes were identified, I emailed each participant a summary of their interview, as well as themes that emerged to have them review for accuracy, and I asked them to clarify any information, if needed.

Triangulation

Triangulation refers to using differing data sources and methods of data collection, and also more than one researcher to corroborate the data and have information from as many sources as possible in regards to the phenomenon under review (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Triangulation adds credibility to the research by confirming information, which will allow for more credibility in the results. The current study used several participants to create a homogenous sample, which will produce triangulation.

Reflexive Journaling

Reflexive journaling is a tool that helps researchers manage their own bias and preconceptions, take notes on initial impressions, keep track of the data collection process

and document any patterns and emerging themes (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Reflexive journaling was used in the proposed study to reflect on interesting points or themes that came up in the interview process.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which research findings can be transferred to other contexts and settings **(**Creswell, 2017). In qualitative research, transferability is not about making any big statements or claims; it is about inviting the reader into the research so they can make judgements about whether the research can transfer to their own personal experience, context, or setting **(**Korstjens & Moser, 2017). To enhance transferability, Korstjens and Moser (2017) suggest the use of thick description, which allows the researcher to provide detailed and thorough descriptions of the participants, the data analysis process, and the emerging themes and assumptions that are central to the study. For the current study, the interviews with the foster parents provided a thick description of their lived experience of the foster parents. The data analysis process is described in detail and all emerging themes that came from the participant interviews can be judged for the transferability of findings.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of findings over time **(**Lincoln & Guba, 1985) Dependability is achieved when a researcher can show that they were careful and consistent and no mistakes were made in conceptualizing the study, in the data collection process, and in the interpretation and report of the final results. Basically, a researcher needs to demonstrate consistency throughout the entire research process to ensure the

results are dependable. Dependability can also be attained through credibility and the use of triangulation, which is described above, and through the use of an audit trail (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

An audit trail is a transparent description of each step of the research process from beginning to the very end and reporting of results (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). These records are kept throughout the study to ensure consistency and ability to replicate the process. An audit trail was used in the current study, which allows my dissertation committee, readers, and/or other researchers to review the raw data as well the process of data analysis that led to findings and results.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which research findings can be confirmed by other researchers to ensure that findings were clearly derived from data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability can be achieved through the use of an audit trail, as discussed above, as it will provide a chain of evidence that demonstrates how findings were derived from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). It can also be achieved through the use of reflexive journaling, which provides the opportunity to crosscheck the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). For the current study an audit trail and reflexive journaling were used.

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Ethical Procedures

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Prior to beginning the data collection process, Walden University IRB approval was granted. Walden University's approval number for this study is 05-15-20-0104193 and it expired May 14, 2021. The advertisement to participate in the study was presented

at via a foster parent forum group on social media, and the invitation to join the study was emailed to group members and posted on the foster parent forum's social media page. There was no pressure to engage in the study, and participants that were interested were provided contact information to show interest or ask more questions about the study. Foster parents who have been licensed in the state of Washington for at least one year that have experienced three or more placement disruptions were included in the study. The individuals who respond that qualified and were interested in participation in the study were sent a consent form via email so they were able to take time to read more about the study and decide if they want to participate. If they did want to move forward as a participant, they replied to the email with the words, "I consent." They were then assigned an identification number, which was used in communication to ensure privacy and that confidentiality of the participants.

An explanation of the limits of confidentiality can be found in the informed consent document, and each participant was reminded verbally prior to being interviewed. I ensured that I fully describe the limits of confidentiality to each participant, as well as the priority to ensure the participant's privacy. Participants were informed that per Washington State law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, which include a threat of physical harm to others or one's self or any admission or report of child abuse or neglect. I ensured that each participant was aware of my mandated reported status in the state of Washington, as I have a duty to report any disclosures of child abuse and neglect.

During the interview process, there is always a possibility that participants could experience psychological distress when discussing events that are personal, emotional, or upsetting about their personal experience. While substantial psychological distress in unlikely in the current study, mental health supports were provided to all participants in the study should their participation have led to any psychological distress.

To ensure privacy, the interviews were set up in a location where the interview could not be heard or observed by any other parties using a virtual format. The interviews were audio recorded, and each file was recorded by number identification. The names of the participants were kept confidential, and the recordings of the interviews were encrypted and saved on an external drive that were kept in a locked filing cabinet when not in use. The data will be kept for the allotted time of five years and then the drive will be reformatted to safely destroy all data contained on it.

While I did not have a professional working relationship with any of the foster parents who choose to participate in the study, I am a supervisor a team of investigators at Child Protective Services, and we make decision about the removal of children from their caregivers as a part of our daily work. I do not have much contact with foster parents in my work, but my role at Child Protective Services could be perceived as creating a power differential. I addressed this by being open, honest, and transparent about my professional role and my role as a researcher and student in the current research study. I ensure that I was aware of my own biases related to my role in Child Protective Services and discussed those with my dissertation committee, as needed and reflected on this in my reflexive journal writing.

Summary

The current study was described in Chapter 3, which began with a detailed description of IPA and the rationale of the use of IPA in the proposed study. A description of the role of the researcher as the primary data collection tool was provided, as well as a detailed description of the methodology. Lastly, issues of trustworthiness were discussed and the methods that will be used to ensure trustworthiness were described in detail, followed by a discussion of any perceived ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Results

The impact of placement disruptions for youths removed from their biological parents and/or guardians due to abuse and neglect and placed in out-of-home care has been the focus of multiple studies (Epstein et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2015; Villodas et al., 2016). There are long-lasting impacts on children's emotional, social, and psychological well-being that can last well into adulthood (Rock et al., 2015). These vulnerable youths are often at a great disadvantage and struggle with behavioral problems, mental health instability, difficulties creating healthy attachments, and lingering in out-of-home care (Blakey et al., 2012; Epstein et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2015). Foster parents play a critical role in supporting, caring for, and creating healthy attachments for children who are placed in out-of-home care and have the potential to mitigate placement disruptions with the right tools and supports in place (Bernedo et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience of foster parents with regard to placement disruptions, and to gain further understanding of how attachment may impact placement disruptions from the perspective of foster parents. In this study, foster parents described what they believed were the major contributing factors that led to placement disruptions, and what they felt could have been helpful to mitigate the placement disruptions they experienced. Foster parents also described how attachment impacts placement, as well as what supports and training have been or could be helpful. The research questions were as follows: What is the lived experience of placement disruptions for foster parents? How do foster parents experience attachments with foster children? This chapter focuses on the setting where the study

took place, participant demographics, an overview of the data collection process and data analysis process, and the results of the study.

Research Setting

Due to the public health crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic, all semi-structured interviews took place by phone or in a virtual setting. I was in a private and confidential setting where interviews could not be overheard to protect the privacy of each participant. All participants were provided the option of how they would like to participate using a virtual format (e.g., Zoom or Skype) or by phone. Two of the participants chose to use a virtual format, while the other four chose to do the interview by phone. All participants reported and/or appeared to be in their home or in a private setting while completing the interview process. Because some of the participants were in their homes caring for children during the interview process, some of them experienced brief interruptions to talk to children or get them settled, and then the interview resumed.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a drastic impact on foster parents due to stay-at-home orders, school closures, and a significant loss of foster parent supports, which also had an impact on participant recruitment. Prior to the pandemic, there were many foster parents interested in the interview process, but several foster parents who showed initial interest ended up not participating due to the COVID-19 pandemic and dealing with multiple responsibilities, as well as the added stress and fear related to the public health crisis. I chose to stop recruitment after interviewing the sixth participant due to lack of follow through or interest in the interview process. Because of the public health crisis, funding was cut for a number of foster parent supports, and all in-person supports for

foster parents and youths stopped in order to follow stay-at-home orders. Although these unprecedented circumstances had a great impact on foster parents who were interviewed as part of the current study, saturation was met with the sixth participant.

I work as a supervisor at Child Protective Services, and I made clear to all participants that my role in the current study was a doctoral student only. Each participant reported that they understood and would engage with me as a doctoral student. I had no prior professional contacts with any of the participants in the study. There was no incentive for participation, and there were no known superfluous conditions, other than the COVID-19 pandemic, that may have influenced participants or their experience during the interviews that would have impacted the interpretation of the study results.

Demographics

The participants consisted of one man and five women who all self-reported that they were licensed foster parents in the State of Washington for at least 1 year. The participants' average age was 42.33, and their years of experience as licensed foster parents ranged from 2.5 years to 21 years. Participants 3 and 4 were a married couple. I offered to interview them separately, but they requested to be interviewed together. All participants self-reported that they had experienced at least three placement disruptions, but most of the foster parents had experienced many more than three placement disruptions. Three participants reported to had experienced over 100 placement moves during their years as foster parents. Some of these moves were described as short-term planned placement moves for respite, and there were also more significant long-term disruptions in placements reported, as well.

Data Collection

Data were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews that were completed by phone with four of the participants and via a virtual platform (Zoom and FaceTime) for the other two participants. Interviews were scheduled for 1 hour, but most of the interviews went over 1 hour due to the length of the participant's responses. At the 1 hour mark, I checked to see if the participants felt they needed a break or if they wanted to proceed with the interview. All participants chose to proceed. None of the interviews went longer than an hour and a half. All participants provided consent to be interviewed and recorded, and the audio recording of the interview was later transcribed for data analysis. There was no video recording of the interviews. During the interviews that took place in a virtual setting, I was able to see nonverbal cues of the participants, which I was not able to see during the phone interviews. Although this created a difference in the communication that occurred between me and the participants, it did not appear to have impacted the interview process or participant responses in any significant way. There were no discrepancies or circumstances that impacted the data collection process that were described in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

Although the COVID-19 pandemic impacted participant recruitment and my decision to end recruitment, saturation was met with the sixth participant. The basis for understanding the lived experience of foster parents in relationship to placement disruptions and how attachment impacts placement disruptions was drawn from the semi-structured interviews with the six participants. The data analysis process indicated five

main themes with 18 subthemes. The five major themes that emerged from the data analysis process were as follows: foster parent support, communication, foster parent training, youth and foster parent trauma, and building relationships and connections. From these five themes, 18 subthemes emerged (see Table 1).

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Foster parent support	Communication	Foster parent training	Youth and foster parent trauma	Building relationships and connections
Struggles with getting respite	Positive interactions and experiences with birth parents	Learning more about the impact of trauma on children in care	Concerns about how trauma impacts behaviors for youth in care	Creating stability, structure and consistency with youth
Foster parents understanding the needs of other foster parents	Frustrations with social workers	Learning more about how to connect with and care for teenagers	Difficulty in building trust with youth in care that are impacted by trauma	Positive interactions with birth parents to create connection with youth
Supported by family and friends	Concerns about the lack of information about children placed in out-of-home care		Grief and loss experienced by youth due to placement moves	Frustrations related to social worker turnover
Concerns about the loss or change of important foster parent supports	Lack of involvement in decision making that leads foster parents to feel that their voices aren't heard		Grief and loss experienced by foster parents	
Foster parent's suggestions on ways to improve supports				

Discrepant findings were defined as participant remarks that were in the minority and did not align with a major theme. The discrepant findings in the current study included foster parent knowledge of the child welfare system and profession impacting what is needed for training and support, the experience of losing family and friend support due to lack of understanding and information due to confidentiality restrictions for children placed in and out-of-home care, and the Mockingbird Family Model of foster care, which is a specialized type of foster care that provides an extended family system and supports that create a positive experience for foster parents that is different than fostering outside of this model. These findings are described in more detail later in this chapter.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

For the current study, trustworthiness was established using a variety of methods, which included triangulation, prolonged engagement, member checking, reflexive journaling, thick description, and an audit trail. The use of these methods demonstrated the current study's credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility establishes trustworthiness in research because it ensures a clear link between the findings in a study and the reality of what was reported in participant interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants should be able to recognize their lived experience as truthful in the research findings, and this ensures that the study is credible. For the purpose of the current study, the methods used were prolonged engagement, member checks, triangulation, and external audits.

Prolonged engagement refers to the researcher investing sufficient time to become familiar with the population and build trust with the participants to help detect any distortions that might be present so they can be attended to (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). For the current study, I took time to understand the population by talking to a foster parent forum program manager to understand the population better. I also took time to build rapport with each of the participants prior to asking the interview questions.

Member checking provides researchers with the opportunity to ensure accuracy of interpretation of the participant interviews by checking with participants and allowing them to review the work and provide feedback and clarification as needed (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). After transcribing and analyzing each participant interview for the current study, I completed summaries of each interview and emailed them to each participant to give them the opportunity to review the summary, ask questions, clarify information, and make changes if needed. None of the requested clarification or asked for changes to be made in the summaries.

Triangulation refers to using differing data sources, methods of data collection, and more than one researcher to corroborate the data and have information from as many sources as possible in regard to the phenomenon under review (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Triangulation allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, as well as the lived experiences of the participants. For the current study, a homogenous sample was used, which created triangulation and added credibility to the study by ensuring confirmation of the results from the perspective of multiple participants with shared experiences as foster parents.

Reflexive journaling was used in the current study to help me manage bias, take notes on initial impressions, keep track of the data collection process, and document any patterns and emerging themes (see Korstjens & Moser, 2017). I took notes to recap initial ideas presented by each participant and to identify and organize themes and patterns that began to emerge during the interview process.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which research findings can be transferred to other experiences, contexts, and settings (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative researchers invite the reader into the research so they can draw their own impressions and conclusions about whether the research is able to transfer to other experiences, contexts, and settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). To enhance transferability, I used thick description to provide detailed and thorough descriptions of the participants, the data analysis process, and the emerging themes (see Korstjens & Moser, 2017). For the current study, participant interviews were analyzed to provide a rich and thick description of the lived experiences of the participants to develop themes and subthemes from the words of each of the participants, which would allow the reader the opportunity to judge the transferability of the findings for themselves. Although some of the participant interviews occurred by phone and nonverbal cues could not be witnessed by me, I was able to note subtle differences in tone of voice that allowed for thick description and richer understanding of the participants' responses.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of findings over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is achieved when a researcher can show that they were careful and consistent and no mistakes were made in conceptualizing the study, in the data collection process, and in the interpretation and report of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A researcher needs to demonstrate consistency throughout the research process to ensure the results are dependable. To demonstrate dependability in the current study, I used an audit trail to provide a record of each of the steps related to the research process, which included maintaining transcripts of interviews, taking descriptive notes about the data, and making personal journal entries.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which research findings can be confirmed by other researchers to ensure that findings were clearly derived from data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the current study, an audit trail was used to enhance confirmability by keeping a record of each of the steps of the data analysis process to ensure interpretation of the data provided accurate and true results. Reflexing journaling was also used to allow for the opportunity to cross check the data (see Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

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Results

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The participants were asked ten questions, and significant statements about the experience of placement disruptions and attachment with youths in foster care were identified from each of the participant responses. The interview questions were developed to help answer the overarching question that underlies the current study: What are the

lived experience of placement disruptions and attachment with youth in foster care for foster parents? After reviewing each participant interview thoroughly, there were five themes identified based on participant responses, and the overarching research questions: foster parent supports; communication; foster parent training; youth and foster parent trauma; and building relationships and connections. To identify themes, I determined that a majority of participant responses that endorses an overarching idea would be included as a theme. Participant responses that were in the minority and didn't amalgamate on any of the major themes are noted as, "discrepant findings," and are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Theme 1: Foster Parent Support

When the participants discussed placement disruptions that they had experienced, it became clear that support or lack of support was a widespread theme that impacted whether foster parents were able to maintain placements. Participants described important supports in their lives that helped them maintain placements, and they also described frustrations with a lack of support from the system that created obstacles for them to maintain placements. The participants also described supports that they felt would be beneficial and could potentially mitigate placement disruptions youths in care. When describing foster parents supports, the following sub-themes emerged from the data: struggles with getting respite; foster parents understanding the needs of other foster parents; supported by friends and family; concerns about the loss or change of important foster parents supports; and foster parent suggestions on ways to improve supports.

Subtheme 1.1: Struggles With Getting Respite

Respite, which allows foster parents to take breaks from caregiving to go on vacation for self-care or to deal with other life stressors that may arise, was discussed by all participants as one of the key supports to help maintain placements of children in out-of-home care. When discussing the importance of having respite for self-care, P3 stated, "We had that little girl for 3 months, and we didn't take respite, by the end of those 3 months, I had gum disease, I wasn't sleeping well." P3 further stated, "You just want to help these poor kids, you know, and you focus all your time and energy on these kids and you don't take any time for yourself," which most participants felt causes foster parents to burn out and stop taking placements altogether. There are also times when foster parents fall ill and need help with respite and if they aren't provided respite, they might not be able to maintain a placement. P4 discussed a time when he and his wife provided respite for three teen boys for a foster parent that had to deal with a serious medical issue and stated, "They wouldn't have been able to continue with the placement if it wasn't for the two weeks of respite that we provided."

While respite was identified as a vital support to foster parents that is supposed to be provided by the child welfare system, all participants reported frustration with the system and struggles with getting respite when needed and/or requested. Participant 3 stated, "They had been asking for respite for a month in advance, but they would end up having to drop the kids at the office on their way to the airport, so they wouldn't even know if it was going to be a hotel or where the kids were going." This adds further stress for foster parents, as they want to know ahead of time that there is a plan for respite, and

also have an idea to help prepare the youths they are caring for, so they know where they will be going.

P5 stated, "I want to know that I'm going to have respite, and I want it confirmed and not wait till the last minute to see." Participant 4 felt like the child welfare system always seems to be in panic mode when it comes to placements and respite stating, "For 14 years I have seen this, it's always the firefighting mode…if we have a placement and things are going relatively smoothly, you already find yourself at the bottom of the pile, so the only way the State functions is when there is a fire, and if there is a kid blowing out-of-home or someone set a fire in a home, that case takes top priority and all the other ones fall down the priority list." Thus, if there isn't an emergent reason for respite, foster parents do not often get it as they should, which creates a great deal of frustration and burnout and can also be a cause for placement disruptions for youth in care.

P6 reported, "it was really hard to find respite for three kids," and P5 shared that she sometimes tries to look for respite herself on the foster parent Facebook page, and then reaches out to the social worker to get it confirmed only to find out that her email was lost by the social worker, which caused frustration. P5 shared that they sent an email stating, "Hey, they [foster parents doing respite] still haven't gotten the respite email….so are they even going to get reimbursed for the respite or not?" Foster parents are supposed to be provided the support to find and secure respite by the child welfare workers, so the additional stress foster parents feel to find it themselves can be overwhelming. All participants felt that the system should be more supportive with respite, and the system should also have a better understanding of why foster parents

need respite to support with self-care. P3 stated that they wished social workers would reach out and just say, "It's been 3 months, you have never taken respite, you need to take respite."

Subtheme 1.2: Foster Parents Understanding the Needs of Other Foster Parents

The majority of participants felt that one of their main supports in maintaining placements comes from other foster parents who have had similar experiences, especially when facing a difficult situation with a youth placed in their home. P2 shared, "Foster parents who know and understand are a huge support, like that online board you can get on at midnight. You can post a question…on one of the foster parent boards, like we just had another visit missed and it super sucked, just throwing it out there and other foster parents get it, so that was nice." P3 shared, "the ability to get together with other foster parents, whether online or in person, meeting up together was invaluable." When discussing foster parents as a support, P6 stated, "Former and past placements, the other foster parents that have had those kids were also a good support because we all shared a history with each other and those kids, so I think that is a big support." P4 stated, "Just getting together monthly to be able to talk to other foster parents that were going through similar things was therapeutic – it was huge. Finally, somebody understands what we are going through."

Subtheme 1.3: Supported by Friends and Family

All participants also felt that their family and/or friend networks were a major source of emotional support, but also a source of support when it comes to caring for the youth in their homes. P1 shared, "We had a kiddo come days before Christmas with

nothing, and my community of friends, my literal neighbors, showed up at my doorstep and dropped stuff off. They brought toys, they brought gifts, they brought diapers, they brought formula, they brought clothes, they asked what do you need, and we will get you a gift card or order it online and sent it to you. They were amazing."

P2 stated, "We have a strong extended family and friend network who were constantly in our home and supporting us. Whether it was like coming over to help set up a birthday party, or to take the kids for the weekend. We could not have done it for as long as we have without those people."

When discussing the most important supports, P6 shared, "We have my parents that live in town, and they have been a big support. I've couple of friends that are really good supports and have taken the kids for the day or the night and other extended support from work."

Subtheme 1.4: Concerns About the Loss or Change of Important Foster Parent Supports

At the time interviews were occurring with participants, foster parents had all just learned that a very important support program called, Fostering Together, just had their contract with the state cut, which caused a great deal of concern. Fostering Together focused on finding and supporting foster parents from licensing, to first placements and beyond. They had liaisons that would attend meetings with foster parents at child welfare offices, help with individual support for foster parents with placements, and they also led regular support groups and dinners where foster parents could get together and learn from each other. According to participants, it was a significant loss when there is already so

little support for foster parents to maneuver through the child welfare system successfully. P1 stated, "We just lost the contract for Fostering Together, and that is a huge loss." Participants were also informed that the State would be taking the contract over from Fostering Together, which means child welfare services would be the ones that are supposed replace that support, which caused some participants to feel both frustrated and concerned. P3 stated, "It's very frustrating to have things taken away that are supportive and then to have to be working with the State to replace that support, when they are the ones that don't listen well to us in the first place." P4 shared, "The State decided that we don't need Fostering Together support, which is actually what held us together." Participants shared that the loss of important supports like these impact foster parents and their ability to maintain placements.

Participants also discussed frustration around changes that the State decides to make that are supposed to be helpful, but turn out to add more stress. P6 reported, "I had a really hard time when coordinated care took over the medical portion for foster kids. They screwed up a lot of things with the kids' medical insurance and coverage at the doctors, and I spent more hours than I ever anticipated dealing with that on the phone and letters and all that stuff, so I know that the intention behind that was to make things easier for foster parents and more seamless, but in my experience it really screwed a lot of stuff up."

Some participants also felt that the State decides to make changes without considering or even talking to foster parents about the changes. P6 shared, "I think when changes like that happens it would be helpful for foster parents to get more support in

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understanding why it's happening and what it's going to mean and what you need to be doing to make sure that care is continued and you're approved for the right doctors. It threw a wrench in a lot of things, so when big changes like that happen, I think it would be helpful for foster parents to have someone advocating for them and helping them walk through that."

Subtheme 1.5: Foster Parents' Suggestions on Ways to Improve Supports

Many of the participants felt that 24-hour hotlines or mentors to support foster parents, especially new foster parents with placement crises or to answer questions would be a huge support in helping maintain placement stability. P1 shared, "If they could have a foster parent hotline staffed by other foster parents and maybe someone from placement or licensing, where we could call and ask questions like, my teenager told me they would be home at 10:15 and they aren't; what should I do?" Participants also felt that mentors could also be helpful when dealing with a difficult placement. When discussing a child with extreme behavioral concerns, P1stated, "It would have been nice to have called someone, like a mentor, to come sit in my home with me and help me understand what I needed to do to keep the child calm." Assigned social workers do not have the time or ability to sit with foster parents and mentor them when they have placement of a child with difficult behaviors, and there aren't existing supports like this in place for foster parents. Participants felt that mentors could be supportive and help further train foster parents to manage behaviors, which could mitigate disruptions.

Participants also felt mentors or advocates could support foster parents to understand how to work within the system. P6 stated, "it would be helpful for people to

have more support in getting through the system and understanding how to navigate all of

that would be helpful, and I don't know exactly what that would look like, but just maybe

a mentor or someone that has been a foster carer for a while that can walk you through

what to expect and how to navigate court hearings, and doctor's appointments, and

getting connected to different non-profits and that sort of thing."

Theme 2: Communication

As participants discussed their experience with placement disruptions, a clear

pattern emerged around communication with birth parents and those involved in the child

welfare system that impacted placement stability in both positive and negative ways.

Participants discussed open communication and dialogue with birth parents that was

positive, and also discussed poor communication and a lack of communication with

children welfare workers that caused frustration, impacted placement stability for youth

in care, and left foster parents feeling left out of important decisions that are made about

placement. As participants discussed the differing impacts of communication, the

following sub-themes emerged: positive interactions and experiences with birth parents,

frustration with social workers, and concerns about lack of information about children

placed in out-of-home care, and lack of involvement in decision making that leads foster

parents to feel that their voices aren't heard.

Subtheme 2.1: Positive Interactions and Experiences With Birth Parents

The majority of foster parents discussed how contact and regular communication

with birth parents allowed for more stability in placements and also supported the path to

reunification. P1 discussed having regular contact with the birth mother to provide visits

between the mother and baby that was placed in her home as a very positive and stabilizing experience. P1 shared, "After the Zoom calling started, I did 6 days per week for an hour to an hour and a half. She got to see the baby, talk to the baby, I would feed the baby, she got to talk to me, she even got to know my kids, and I felt like we had a relationship."

Participants shared how communication with the birth parents created relationships that allowed foster parents to act as natural supports for the birth parents after reunification, which also helps stabilize placements when children return home. P2 shared, "The mom and I have a good relationship. She is even still willing to let her daughter come and spend weekends with us on occasion, so we can still be a support to the mother and the children." P5 stated, "They [the kids] were with us for ten months, and the parents did everything they needed to do and they returned home, and then we still have a relationship with them and take care of the kids for them sometimes."

P3 discussed that helping kids talk to their birth parents on the phone is stabilizing for placement and a support to the parents, especially for kids that have a hard time staying focused when on the phone. P3 shared, "When you are dealing with young people and doing phone visits, often it the parents that does the talking, so I would talk to their mom when she was asking questions if they weren't answering or weren't interested. A lot of kids can't hold attention for very long when it is a phone visit, so we got to be friends."

Subtheme 2.2: Frustrations With Social Workers

Many of the participants discussed concerns related to social workers not demonstrating respect in communication and also making assumptions or decisions for foster parents regarding their schedule or doing supervised visits with birth parents, all of which directly impacted placement disruptions. P1 shared, "The social worker called me and said they would be at my house in 15 minutes to pick up the kid for a visit, and I told her that there was no visit scheduled, and I was more than an hour away from my home." P1 went on to say that the social worker told her she needed to make the child available for the visit and it didn't matter if the visit wasn't scheduled, so P1 had to change her own appointment and return to her home. P1 expressed great frustration around the ongoing lack of communication with this particular social worker, and reports that she told the social worker, "This is the last straw. You are taking this child for a visit, and I will have them available, but you will not bring them back, because I am not willing to work with you anymore."

Lack of communication and respect by the social worker created an ongoing problem for the foster parent to the point where the child's placement was disrupted. In discussing a child that had difficult behaviors, P1 stated, "The child did have problems, and I would have kept him, but I just couldn't deal with the social worker anymore because the social worker's lack of communication and the respect to me was so missing."

P2 discussed supporting a social worker by doing supervised visits between a child in her care and her birth mother, but the birth mother kept missing visits and not

being appropriate during visits, and P2 felt uncomfortable with continuing to do visits because she didn't want to be in a position where she was having to "tattle" on the birth parent. P2 stated that when she informed the social worker that she didn't want to supervise visits any longer, the social worker said, "Okay, well we are going to move her to this other foster home then because they are willing to do visits," which P2 felt was "very retaliatory" and also not in the best interest of the child to disrupt a placement just because P2 didn't want to supervise visits, which isn't even really the foster parent's responsibility in the first place.

When speaking about doing a supervised visit that the social worker scheduled and assumed that the foster parent would be fine with, P5 stated, "The social worker stated that they didn't think I would have a problem with it and just assumed that I was available during the time they scheduled the visit, which was frustrating." P5 also shared that the social worker "scheduled the visit during the child's regular nap time, because they weren't aware of his schedule, and didn't communicate with me ahead of time to see what works best for me and for the child."

Some participants also felt frustrated by social workers making promises to kids that don't happen, which causes placement instability due to the child feeling let down or disappointed causing behavioral changes. When speaking about social worker's scheduling and re-scheduling visits to the home or promising kids anything regarding visits with their parents that they aren't sure will occur, P3 shared, "Foster parents actually quit because social workers promise things to kids that don't happen."

P5 discussed differences in what social workers communicate with regard to placements, stating, "It's frustrating when one social worker is telling you something and then the next one comes and kind laughs about it and makes it a joke, so then it's like I don't really know what to believe anymore."

Subtheme 2.3: Concerns About the Lack of Information About Children Placed in Out-of-Home Care

Many of the participants felt that lack of information regarding child behaviors creates a substantial concern and jeopardizes placement stability. P1 shared, "I have had two times where I have had to send a child from my home because I just couldn't. This child was not the age they told me, he was older, and he was very ragey, he came from domestic violence, I hadn't had any experience with domestic violence at that point."

P5 shared that she was contacted by after hours to take placement of two sisters, and she reports she was told by the social worker, "They are young and great. They have no behaviors and everything should be relatively simple with them." P5 shared that she agreed to placement and the sisters came to her home and stated, "Their behaviors were out of control. They were head banging, screaming, running down the hallway at 11:00 at night. It was just not what I was expecting at all they were spitting at me and at each other, and had I known they had these behaviors I wouldn't have agreed to the placement. I called the social worker and told them they had to pick up the children on Monday, because I couldn't manage their behaviors with the other medically fragile child I had in my care." P5 stated, "Maybe these two sisters wouldn't have so many placement disruptions if foster parents knew what to expect when agreeing to take them."

Participants also felt that they were was a lack of communication in general and not just specific to child behaviors that is also frustrating. P5 stated, "It's like everybody has the information except for us [foster parents], but we are the ones that the children are living with, and we are taking care of them daily. We are required to go above and beyond to take care of the kids that are placed with us, but we aren't given all the information, which makes it really difficult."

Subtheme 2.4: Lack of Involvement in Decision Making That Leads Foster Parents to Feel That Their Voices Are Not Heard

All participants shared that they feel they have no voice when it comes to decision making around placement decisions or any decisions, which is concerning to them because they spend more time with the children than any other person involved in the child's child welfare case. P2 shared a story about a child in her care that had to transition to a new foster home to be placed with siblings that were also in out-of-home care. P2 stated that a meeting was scheduled to discuss the transition and stated, "They wanted to move her in a week, and they had already pre-decided, and I thought you cannot just cut and paste children from one family to the next and think that is okay, for the foster family they are leaving, for the child, for all of the network that was connected to that kiddo." P2 further shared, "I advocated for her and what her feelings were at the time, but my voice was definitely not a part of the decision making." Ultimately, P2 realized that she had no say and stated, "I understand that I don't have control to make the decision, but for the transition plan just to be decided and I have no say. I am with her every day."

P3 shared, "I think a lot of times that the people are making decisions for foster kids, and the way the kids are worked through the system, really have never been in a foster parent's shoes. So, it would be really nice if the people making the decisions had some understanding of what it is like to be in our shoes. That is how bad decisions get made."

P4 stated, "The Department makes huge decisions about what is best for the children, and don't really include the foster parent in that decision making, when the foster parent is who spends the most time with the child. The foster parents should have more of a voice."

P5 shared, "It just kind of feels like we aren't part of the team," while P1 felt that there would be fewer placement disruptions for children in out-of-home care if "we could all just work together."

Theme 3: Foster Parent Training

The majority of participants discussed how training, in general, impacts placement for youth in out-of-home care, but they felt certain trainings were more important than others when to comes to mitigating placement disruptions. All participants noted that children placed in out-of-home care have significant trauma histories that impacts their overall well-being, emotions, and behaviors, so it is very important that foster parents receive training on this topic. The majority of foster parents also noted that teenagers present challenges in placement that are different than babies or younger children, so training in this area would be beneficial to help with placement stability. In discussing foster parent training with participants, the following sub-themes were

identified: learning more about the impact of trauma on children in care, and learning more about how to connect with and care for teenagers.

Subtheme 3.1: Learning More About the Impact of Trauma on Children in Care

While sharing about the importance of training related to trauma, P1 shared, "Trauma informed care is a huge thing because when you parent your own kids they don't have those experiences that a kiddo coming into foster care will have, and even if they can't tell you [about their trauma], they show you in their behaviors and actions, so it is imperative to have trainings to help foster parents know how to deal with this."

P3 stated, "Required training for foster parents should include TBRI (Trust-Based Relational Intervention), or any trauma related trainings would be most beneficial."

P4 stated, "Whether you are a teen or an infant, once you are removed from your home, I don't care who you are, there is trauma. It just seems like trauma comes up with every one of these kids, so it should be mandated that hours of training are directed at trauma and attachments."

Subtheme 3.2: Learning More About How to Connect With and Care for Teenagers

Many of the participants discussed the different types of training needed for different stages of development, but teens were discussed by most of the participants as presenting with challenges that are different than younger children in care that might require additional understanding and training to support in placement stability. P1 stated, "I think I would have a harder time with a teenager, because teenagers come with an attitude. I think socially we expect teenagers to have attitudes and if they don't, we don't know how to deal with them because the parents just want to tell them to knock off their

attitude, and the kids just want to have an attitude because that is what is expected. In that situation for me, I would want more training on what do you do. How do you get to know someone that is already their own person?"

P6 also felt additional training would be needed for this age group and stated, "I think one thing if we have placements of like older kids, like teens and kids that are 18 to 21, I think maybe more understanding of what your role is with that age group. It's just not an age group that I've worked with a ton, and so I'd imagine setting boundaries is really important but also once kids are adults, the relationship is just different."

Participants also discussed that kids in this age group have also many times experienced more placement disruptions, which can create more challenging behaviors. P4 reported, "Our teenage boy, who has been in 20 homes or whatever, somewhere around there, he just burst into tears when we were being investigated for a licensing violation because for him it meant mom and dad were in trouble and he might get pulled from our home." P3 and P4 felt that this type of trauma and this many placement disruptions make training for this age group even more important for foster parents.

Theme 4: Youth and Foster Parent Trauma

Trauma experienced by youths in out-of-home placements and by foster parents was one of the most salient topics discussed by all participants during the interviews. Participants discussed the many different ways that trauma impacts the social, emotional, and psychological well-being of youths in out-of-home care, and also how it impacts their behavior and ability to trust others. Some of the participants also discussed the impacts of placement moves for youths in care, and the ongoing significance of grief and loss. When

discussing the experience of placement disruptions, participants also shared about their own feelings about what it is like to experience a difficult placement disruption. While discussing the impacts of trauma and youth and foster parents, the follow sub-themes emerged: concerns about how trauma impacts behaviors for youth in care, difficulty in building trust with youth in care, grief and loss experiences by youth due to placement moves, and grief and loss experienced by foster parents.

Subtheme 4.1: Concerns About How Trauma Impacts Behaviors for Youths in Care

Most participants discussed the trauma associated with being removed from abusive situations and how that impacts the behaviors of children placed in their home. P1 shared, "I have had kids scream at me. I hate you – you are not my mom," because the very essence of trauma for most youth is that they have been removed from their parents, and that loss is substantial, and then they come into care and move around so much that they don't have a sense of stability in their lives. P4 stated, "It seems like some of these kids are just so used to going from home to home and it's like there is an internal clock that says, okay, I have been here 3 months, my time is short, so I am going to set a fire to the carpet. Yes, just going AWOL poke holes in the wall, run away with the car, so we have experienced that." In an attempt to try to explain why youth in care might behave in this way, P4 stated, "For no particular reason, other than maybe it has been a certain amount of time and things just get difficult out of the blue."

P5 discussed two young girls that had come to her home for a short stay because they were having difficulty finding placements for these girls, and they had been moved a

number of times. P5 shared, "They came and their behaviors were just out of control. They were spitting at me and at each other and running all over the house."

Participants also discussed how child abuse and neglect histories can directly impact youth behaviors. P2 shared, "Her trauma history was so intense. Her birth dad sexually trafficked her at the age of 2 and a half to the point where, she didn't have the memories of what happened to her, but her body remembered, and we did so much work to help her." When discussing a teen placed in her home, P2 shared, "The way she processed her trauma was re-living things that happened with her birth mom, and her birth mom was abusive, so she would make accusations against us that weren't true…that could have jeopardized our license and our jobs."

Subtheme 4.2: Difficulty in Building Trust With Youths in Care Impacted by Trauma

All participants discussed the importance of building trusting relationships with children placed in out-of-home care and also acknowledged that children that have experienced trauma often have difficulty trusting other adults. P1 shared, "When kids have trauma they don't trust, so I have kids in my house that have flat out told me, I don't trust you, I am not going to believe anything you are going to say, you are going to have to show me what you say is what." When discussing the challenge of building trust with youth in care that have experienced abuse or neglect, P6 shared, "Attachment is based on trust, and if the person that is supposed to love you the most breaks that trust by harming you or allowing other people to harm you, it's hard to build that attachment with other adults because that trust has been broken."

Participants also discussed that children that have experienced multiple moves sometimes even have more difficult in building a trusting relationship. P4 shared, "With our teenager, I think he really has some significant attachment disorder I guess you could say because he has been in 20 homes," which makes it difficult for this youth to feel settled enough to even be able to create a trusting relationship with another adult.

When sharing about the difficulties of building trust with youth, P2 also stated that it takes more time an energy to build trust and help kids feel safe stating, "If a kid has a higher level of trauma, it's harder on our family because we have to spend more time doing more emotional weight lifting and mental thought to reach that kiddo and break down those walls, so yes, it is definitely a bigger burden, but you just have to get a little more creative." P3 also shared that it takes time to overcome trauma to be able to get to a place where youth can feel safe specifically stating, "Her trauma though, she was afraid of the dark. We would have to tell her a half hour before it was going to get dark that it was going to get dark and she wouldn't sleep well, so when she finally felt comfortable with us…she could just relax and know that she was safe."

P6 discussed that sometimes youths in out-of-home care begin to think of foster parents as part of the system, which can impact their trust in the foster parents. P6 stated, "He carried a lot of resentment toward us as representing the system and taking him away from his dad; even though we didn't have anything to do with that, in his mind we represented that." P6 went on to say it took time for this child to understand how to trust and said that she told him, "We need to trust each other and work together and we're not

trying to replace your parents, but we are a family right now, we're living together as a family, and so we're going to work together and a big part of that is trust in each other."

Subtheme 4.3: Grief and Loss Experienced by Youths Due to Placement Moves

Across all interviews, participants discussed the emotional difficulties and experience of on-going loss that youths in out-of-home care face due to placement moves that aren't planned, and they also discussed how youths feel hopeful about going to a home where they can be adopted or stay until they return to their biological parents. In discussing a placement with a sibling set of 3 boys that were going to move to a relative's home, P6 shared, "There was a relative that was going to maybe take them and so there was a lot of hope that would work out, but then that ended up falling through, and that was really hard on the kids." P1 discussed a child that was moved from her home to be placed in an adoptive home and stated, "She was there 18 months and they did not adopt her, it was a planned adopt home, but they did not adopt her, and it was devastating for her, and I didn't want her to be a statistic of move and move and move, so she came back to my home when she was 13."

P3 discussed how grief and loss from the very first placement move from a parent's care into foster care can impact youth sharing, "It was our very first placement and every time I hummed to her or would sing to her she would cry. She kept wanting me to hum or sing, but every time I did she would scream. When I was finally able to meet her mom I asked her about it, and she said, 'yes I used to sing her to sleep every night,' and she hadn't seen her mom in 6 months." All participants acknowledged that initial

removal and any placement move after, including reunification, creates a sense of grief and loss for youths in out-of-home care.

When discussing teens and how multiple placement moves impact youth emotionally, P4 stated, "With the teenagers, particularly the ones that have been in so many homes, when they burn a bridge, they just… feel like they just blew it again and now I am going to go to my 21st home, because I opened my big mouth and said something and now that family is going to want me out of there."

Subtheme 4.4: Grief and Loss Experienced by Foster Parents

Many of the participants discussed the feelings of grief and loss when a plan for placement or even adoption doesn't work out and how that impacts foster parents. P1 and P5 both discussed long-term placements that they had where they thought the children would be able to remain with them. However, if relatives surface and want placement of the children, the children have to move because relatives get priority for placement, per federal mandates. P1 shared that after she heard relatives were going to get placement of a youth in her home that, "Within a month, the family came back and said they want him, so then they moved him with family out of state, and that was a very traumatic placement disruption. I still struggle with that and it has been 13-plus years." P1 shared that immediately after the removal, the relatives allowed the child to come for a visit, but when the child had to return to the relatives, he was very upset and wanted to stay with P1 and her family. P1 stated that the loss was significant and shared, "We lost it. I cried for days…and contemplated not fostering anymore. I didn't take placements for a good six months. I just had to re-group and heal my family up."

P5 shared a similar story about an infant that was placed with her and her family from birth that she thought she was going to adopt because there was no family identified, but then family came forward to take placement. P5 shared, "I mean, taking a drug addicted baby out of the hospital, taking her home, taking her to a therapist, to get them through that hard time, forming that bond and then having your kids form that bond with them, and your family form that bond with them, and everybody in your life, it was definitely a happy place for her, and safe place, she was developing really well. Then, she had to move."

Participants also discussed guilt they felt if they were not able to keep children for long-term placements. P6 shared, "I felt a lot of guilt about not being able to keep them, especially knowing that the places that they were being placed in weren't working out, but just for the sake of our own sanity and our own family, we just couldn't continue maintaining placement for longer than we did."

Participants also acknowledged that the grief and loss is experienced on multiple levels when things don't work out as expected. P1 shared, "I read on the foster parent pages and there is a support group for grief and loss, and it's traumatic when you expect something to go a certain way and you plan for that and it doesn't, so somewhere there is a loss on every front. The bio family has a loss, extended bio family who does not even know about this baby has a loss, parents have a loss, foster parents have a loss and also no voice, and it's really, placement changes are traumatic for everybody."

Theme 5: Building Relationships and Connections

All participants discussed what they felt was most important when working to create connections with youths placed in their care, and they also discussed important connections and relationships with others such and birth parents and social workers. Participants shared what they felt youths in care needed to feel safe and connected, and how developing relationships with birth parents enhanced connections for youths in their home and built lasting relationships and a sense of extended family. Participants also discussed the negative implications of social worker turnover related to relationships and connections. When participant discussed relationships and important connections, the following sub-themes emerged: creating stability, structure, and consistency with youths, positive integrations with birth parents to create connections with youths, and frustrations related to social worker turnover.

Subtheme 5.1: Creating Stability, Structure, and Consistency With Youths

All participants shared similar beliefs about how to help youths feel connected and safe when placed in out-of-home care, and most pronounced were a sense of structure, consistency and stability. P3 shared, "We try to create a very predictable schedule, and typically…we don't leave the home for a while to create that predictability. Meals at the same time, bed time, brushing teeth, you know everything is predictable and that is where these kids thrive and feel safe." P5 stated that structure can lead to children feel safe and connected, but it can also help with behaviors too, stating, "Kids need to know what the boundaries are, and they need to know what your structure is and what

your rules are and then you're going to have a lot better behavior because they feel safe and can begin to trust."

P6 shared that when you create a safe and stable environment that kids can begin to relax and know that they are safe. P6 shared, "[At first], you could see the fear and uncertainty, and the pain she was carrying. She was able to set some of that aside because she trusted that she was in a safe place and that she had a connection." P6 also shared that keeping your word can also be stabilizing and demonstrate to children in your care that you can be trusted. P6 stated, "Over the last year that he was with us, he definitely let his guard down and saw from our actions that we kept our word and that we were there to support him and that we had boundaries and limits to keep him safe and to help him learn, and so he became a lot more bonded to us…"

P3 also felt that "love and hope" can help youth feel connected and further stated, "they just need to know that you are on their side and we are all a team." P6 added that boundaries that create safe environments is paramount in creating connections stating, "I think to build attachment, number one, it's important to establish safety and for kids to understand that they're safe in their home and then that you are honest and listen to them and provide a safe space for them to share their worries and help them work through the trauma that they've experienced."

P1 and P2 both felt that if you can help a child connect through structure, consistency and stability while placed in out-of-home care that it can serve youth well moving forward too. P1 stated, "When a child can bond, attach, and trust, it serves them well their whole life," and P2 stated, "Even when these really big obstacles happen, that

attachment and connection can't be taken away, and I believe it is permanent on their experienced development."

Subtheme 5.2: Positive Interactions With Birth Parents to Create Connections With Youths

All participants felt that positive interactions with birth parents was an important factor in helping a child understand their role as a foster parent, helped youth develop trust with foster parents, and helped build relationships with youth and birth parents that can last even after youth are returned home. P2 shared, "The first time we met our foster daughter's birth mom…she hugged me, in front of our foster daughter, and I will never forget when she looked up at me and said, 'oh, you're my mom's friend,' and it was like she instantly trusted me more. It was like she didn't have to do loyalty or choose between us. She was taken out of that tension and immediately saw that I was for her mom, so to me, connecting to my kids is connecting with their birth parents."

P5 shared that demonstrating that you aren't against birth parents also has a huge impact on creating connections. P5 shared, "I think that was also a big piece of that, to say we're not trying to take you away from your family, we're trying to keep you with your family…and not talking down about their parents, so that was probably another way that we were trying to form that bond." P6 added that helping facilitate contact with birth parents is also important, stating, "I think that's important in building trust and attachment is showing kids that you value that relationship that they have and when it's safe and healthy that you'll help facilitate contact with them."

P6 shared a specific example where she remembered the importance of honoring the birth parent's role for children. P6 shared, "I think it's really important that you honor that relationship that the kids do have with their parents and foster it as much as you can within what's appropriate, and so like one example I had is the four-year-old that was with us had to go under anesthesia to get some dental work done. He had probably lived with us maybe two months at this point and when he came out of anesthesia, he was just, as you can expect, crying and really emotional and so I, in stepping into the role of caregiver, comforting him and hugging him and holding him but also when he's crying for his mom recognizing that I'm not his mom and that he does have a mother who is thinking about him and caring about him." P6 added that she allowed this child to call his mom after this appointment and stated that she felt it "helped him have the comfort, the physical comfort from me but also trusting that when appropriate and when it's healthy to have contact with his mom and dad was also an option."

When P1 shared that she was doing virtual visits between an infant placed in her home and the birth mother to develop a bond between the mother and child, she also built a lasting connection herself. P1 shared, "I feel like when she gets out of treatment. She will come to our house for Thanksgiving. I feel like my family grew, and we didn't take care of this baby, and get attached to her and love her, and then she is just gone." In sharing a similar story about children returned to their parents, P4 stated, "We still have a very good relationship with them. They live like a mile and a half down the road, and we see them all the time, about once a month." Participants felt those lasting connections

even after return home were quite special and also quite important for youth that have experienced placement disruptions in their lives.

Subtheme 5.3: Frustrations Related to Social Worker Turnover

Some of the participants discussed how social worker turnover impacted relationships between foster parents and social workers, but also impacted established relationships between youths placed in care and social workers, which in turn impacted decision making for those children. When discussing high social worker turnover rates in particular offices, P1 shared, "If you ask any foster parents, they are going to say we don't take any placements from a certain office with high social worker turnover, so foster parents are checking in, hey how is your experience with this office, or do you have a social worker in this office that you have a relationship with or work well with because we want to know about it." P1 shared that positive relationships with social workers can make a huge difference for foster parents when deciding to take placements of youth stating, "I had a really good relationship with the social worker, and they just needed a place for him for a night or two until they could get him into a place. She said 'I know that he won't give you any problems and if he does, I will come,' so I said, 'I trust you, so yes I will do it'."

P2 shared that during a time when a big decision about a placement change was occurring for a youth in her home, a new social worker got assigned due to social worker turnover, which impacted the decision making. P2 shared, "Having the high turnover of social workers, for that same little girl that had to move to a new family, it was a brand new social worker. The first time we met her was at the FTDM [meeting to discuss

placement moves], so having those huge decisions that are central to our foster daughter, our family, and everybody that is involved being made with such a new team member was difficult." P2 went on to say that the new social worker hadn't even been to her home and didn't even know the child or the case well stating, "She is not coming out to our home seeing everything. She doesn't see how the mother is interacting, and how the foster parent is interacting, and she doesn't have a good pulse on what is best for the kiddo."

When discussing the loss of a good social worker to turnover, P4 shared, "From the foster parent perspective, it's so frustrating when you have social worker that knows this child really well and has been with the child for a few months or even a couple of years, and then all of a sudden they change the deck chairs and someone new gets assigned, and it happens all the time…it is very disruptive for the foster parents, but even more so to the children that they are supposed to serve."

Discrepant Cases

Two of the participants from the sample reported that they were professionals that worked within or close to the child welfare system, which gave them insights and understanding about how to maneuver within the system and that they did not feel they needed the same training that other foster parents might need. One of these participants was a foster parent liaison that supported other foster parents, so she understood the system well and had created working relationships with child welfare employees due to her job. She stated that this helped her when it came to having a child in her care herself, because when a poor decision was being made or impacted by someone on the team, she

was able to ask to talk to the administrator of the office to complain. She stated this is not something other foster parents might know they can do. The other participant reported that she was a social worker, and so was her partner, so they understood the system well, and also had advanced understanding of mental health and child development, so they didn't need as much training or support.

Two participants shared that they lost family and friend supports due to a lack of understanding and also a lack of information about children placed in out-of-home care due to confidentiality. Foster parents are not allowed to discuss what they know about a foster child's birth family or reasons why a child is being placed in out-of-home care, due to restrictions related to confidentiality. They aren't even allowed to take pictures of foster children to put on their social media, due to licensing policies. This effort is meant to protect the privacy of children and their birth families, but it can be very restricting for foster parents and difficult for their friends and family to understand. One participant stated that she "lost a lot of friends through fostering because they didn't get to know all the things, so they don't feel as close, so they tend to leave." Another participant reported, "My family members, my mom and dad, and her mom and dad don't really get the foster care system, and they don't really understand what we go through," which was difficult and impacted the participant's system of support.

Two of the participants shared that they were a part of the Mockingbird Family Model of foster care, which enhanced their system of support greatly. To explain what this meant, one of the participants shared, "We are what's called a Mockingbird family hub home, so we have been supporting 7 to 10 families in our area for the last 7 years.

Mockingbird family is through the Mockingbird Society, and they have partnered with

the state DCYF office to provide support for different families in different areas. The idea

is like a bicycle hub, and we are the center of that. We provided planned and unplanned

respite for families, and we attend and support families to go to school meetings, state

meeting, and we provided training for the others and have a monthly gathering, and it is

like we are like grandparents to all of the kids in our group." These participants stated

that this model should be used more widely because it provides great support to foster

parents and could also mitigate placement disruptions for youth in care. The participant

stated, "When we were fostering outside of the mockingbird home, it felt like we were on

an island and didn't have any support or help. So, now we are helping these homes and it

is like an extended family and we all help each other and learn from each other and each

other's experience."

Summary

The sample for the current study consisted of six foster parents that self-reported

that they had been licensed in the state of Washington for at least one year and had

experienced at least 3 placement disruptions. The participants were recruited by placed a

participant invite on a virtual foster parent forum group on Facebook. After participants

agreed to participate in the current study and signed consents, each participant completed

a semi-structured interview by phone or in a virtual format using Zoom or Facetime.

During data analysis, the interviews revealed five themes that answered the

research questions. The themes are as follows: foster parent support, communication,

foster parent training, youth and foster parent trauma, and building relationships and connections.

Chapter 5 provides further detail about the interpretation of the results, strengths and limitations of the current study, implication for positive social change, as well as recommendations for future research, and lastly conclusions drawn from the current study to help discuss how to contribute to and move the current research forward.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The goal of the current study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of placement disruptions from the foster parent's perspective, as well as to gain insight from foster parents about what they feel are the main contributing factors that play a role in placement disruption, and what is needed to mitigate placement disruptions. The negative and long-lasting impacts of placement disruptions for youths who reside in foster care have been the focus of many studies, and these vulnerable youths have experienced significant trauma due to abuse and neglect (Epstein et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2015; Villodas et al., 2016). Often, youths in foster care experience multiple placement disruptions, which research has shown can have long-lasting negative impacts that can last into adulthood, which include mental health struggles, behavioral problems, risky behaviors, and difficulty creating secure attachments with people in their lives (Blakey et al., 2012; Epstein et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2015). Research on placement disruptions has demonstrated that foster parents play a critical role in supporting youths in foster care and in mitigating placement disruptions (Bernedo et al., 2016; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014), which is why the aim of the current study was to gain further insight into placement disruptions from foster parents' perspective.

The six participants in the current study had all experienced placement disruptions with youths placed in their care. After analysis of the participant interviews was completed, five main themes and 18 subthemes emerged. This chapter provides a summary and interpretation of the results, a discussion of the limitations of the study,

recommendations for future research, and a discussion of the implications for positive social change related to placement disruptions for youths in out-of-home care.

Interpretation of the Findings

When performing a review of literature, I identified multiple studies that addressed the impacts of placement disruptions for youths placed in out-of-home care (Epstein et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2015; Villodas et al., 2016). Several of these studies focused on placement disruptions from the foster parent's perspective using a quantitative lens (Leathers et al., 2019; Solomon et al., 2017; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014), but minimal research focused on foster parents through a qualitative lens to gain further understanding and insight about their experience with placement disruptions. The current study revealed the following five themes: foster parent support, communication, foster parenting training, youth and foster parent trauma, and building relationships and connections. These themes both confirmed and extended knowledge from previous literature.

Theme 1: Foster Parent Support

Previous research demonstrated that foster parent support, or lack thereof, plays a role in placement disruptions for youths placed in out-of-home care (Leathers et al., 2019; Solomon et al., 2017; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014), but there was not much detail regarding which supports are most beneficial or which supports might be needed. The only supports discussed were related to foster parents not feeling supported by social workers or the child welfare system when youths were placed in their home, which led to placement disruptions (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). In the current study, there were

multiple supports discussed by participants, which extended previous understanding related to what supports foster parents feel are essential and also what supports might impact placement stability. A lack of support from social workers and the child welfare system was discussed by all participants in the current study, supporting previous findings (see Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

More specifically, participants felt respite care was an essential support for foster parents, but often social workers do not work to ensure or provide respite adequately, even when given advance notice. This causes frustration for foster parents, and some participants felt that it led to foster parent burnout and at times led to placement disruptions for youths. Participants also discussed specific foster parent support programs that were either cut completely or changed by the state child welfare agency, which caused a great deal of distress for participants because they were vital supports and the changes created much more work for foster parents, with little to no support. This confirmed previous findings regarding the overall feeling of lack of support felt by foster parents (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

Current participants discussed other supports that they felt were important to help maintain placements, which included family, friends, and other foster parents who understand how difficult and rewarding caregiving for youths in foster care can be. These individuals are able to offer support that others are not able to due to having similar experiences. Participants suggested that mentors could be assigned to new foster parents to help them understand how to work within the child welfare system, as well as provide supports when dealing with difficult placements. This confirmed recent literature stating

that veteran foster parents in mentoring roles can be very supportive to new foster parents (Pope et al., 2020). Participants also suggested a 24-hour hotline that foster parents could call to get help or suggestions when dealing with a behavioral issue or parenting concerns with youths placed in their homes, which was not a specific support discussed in previous literature related to foster parent supports. Participants reported that an array of supports is vital to help in their endeavor to provide care for youths in their homes, and supports also have the potential to impact placement stability.

Theme 2: Communication

In the current study, communication was an overarching theme discussed by all participants as being something that could help or hinder placement stability. In previous research, a lack of communication between foster parents and social workers had been noted as a concern related to placement disruptions (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). In the current study, participants discussed frustrations related to a lack of communication from social workers and lack of detailed information provided by social workers about children being placed in their home, both of which caused placement disruptions for children in their care.

Participants stated that social workers often schedule visitation and other appointments for children placed in their homes without discussing it first with the foster parents to ensure it does not impact their schedules. This caused one of the participants to request a child be removed from her home. P1 shared "I would have kept him, but I just couldn't deal with the social worker anymore because the social worker's lack of communication and the respect to me was so missing." Previous literature did not show

that social worker decision making around scheduling visitation and appointments for youths in out-of-home care had a direct impact on foster parents and placement stability.

Another participant described taking placement of children late at night. This participant was told that they were easy kids with no issues, but when the children came they had significant behavior struggles causing them to disrupt. When the participant reflected on this, they felt that children with behavior issues might not disrupt as often if full details about their behaviors and more understanding of their trauma history were disclosed prior to placement so foster parents could be more prepared. This confirmed previous research showing that challenging behaviors can impact placement stability (Solomon et al., 2017) and that a lack of information about a youth's trauma history can impact the foster parent's experience and placement (Lanigan & Burleson, 2017).

All participants noted that they often are left out of important decision making for children placed in their care, and they feel as if they have no voice and are not a part of the team when it comes to decisions related to the best interest of the child. This confirmed previous literature reporting that foster parents do not feel heard by social workers and those in the child welfare system (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). When discussing a placement decision made for a youth in which a participant felt they had no voice on a decision that impacted the child's best interest, the participant stated they felt that social workers were simply doing a "cut and paste" of the child from one family to another and not considering or taking into account what was in the best interest of the child. The expectation was that the child would fit in wherever they were placed. This was an important finding when considering placement disruptions or moves for children

in care. This finding demonstrated how the voice of foster parents is not always heard or considered in decision making that impacts the best interest of children. Foster parents have much more knowledge about the children they care for than social workers, child welfare staff, or GAL's because foster parents care for these children daily, so they should be a major voice when speaking about what might be in the best interest of the child on their path to reunification with birth parents, which was a major theme in the current study and was confirmed in previous research (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

When discussing communication, participants also discussed a number of positive experiences they had in communicating with birth parents, which led to lasting relationships after children were returned to their birth parents. Previous research suggested that negative experiences related to communication with birth parents have caused foster parent frustration and placement disruptions (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014), but there was no literature on placement disruptions that addressed positive interactions between birth parents and foster parents. Many of the current participants reported that they still have contact with the children that were in their care, and have been a natural support to the birth parents before and after reunification. Participants also discussed how these positive interactions with birth parents allowed the children to feel more comfortable in out-of-home placement because they viewed the foster parent as having a good relationship with their parents. This is a significant finding that could have a great impact on placement disruptions in the future.

Theme 3: Foster Parent Training

Foster parent education and training has been addressed in multiple studies on placement disruptions, which have indicated that the right training and education can make foster parents feel more confident and comfortable in caregiving for the children placed in their homes (Solomon et al., 2017; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Previous research also documented how previous trauma can have a significant impact on a child's behaviors, which can be challenging for foster parents to manage (Biehal, 2014), and how knowledge of previous trauma can allow foster parents to have better understanding of youths placed in their care (Lanigan & Burleson, 2017). Participants in the current study felt that the most important trainings for foster parents are those directed at trauma-informed care and trust-based relational interventions, which confirmed existing literature (see Lanigan & Burleson, 2017). Participants also felt that teen and early adult behaviors were more difficult to manage for many reasons, so training should focus on managing teen behaviors to provide better support and guidance to this group of foster youths, which confirmed previous literature stating that more training with difficult teen behaviors would be beneficial for foster parents (Patterson et al., 2018).

Theme 4: Youth and Foster Parent Trauma

Participants discussed at length the differing aspects of trauma and how that impacted behaviors, as well as building relationships with youths placed in their care. Participants shared that the experience of removal from biological parents creates significant trauma for children and put obstacles in place that make it difficult to build trusting relationships with the youths placed in their care. One of the participants

discussed that children who were removed from their birth parents had already experienced a significant loss and felt let down by the people whom they trusted the most to care for them, so it took time and energy to focus on building a relationship with children in this situation. This confirmed previous literature on youths who had aged out of foster care, which indicated that trauma and placement instability impacted youths' ability to create trusting relationships (Chambers et al., 2017; Nybell, 2013).

Participants reported that older children who had experienced multiple placement moves, which added to their experience of trauma, had in some ways given up and started acting out in hopes that they would be able to control when a placement disruption occurred. A participant discussed that the more moves children experience in care, the more difficult it becomes to create trusting relationship, and another participant expressed that children placed in her care were upset with her because she represented a part of the system that removed the child from his biological parents, which made it extremely difficult to help him feel secure and safe in her home. Although the overall theme of how previous trauma impacts children in out-of-home care was presented in previous research (Nybell, 2013; Chambers et al., 2017), the details and stories presented by current participants based on their lived experience added knowledge and further understanding from the foster parent's perspective about how attachment impacts placement stability.

Grief and loss for both foster parents and youths was discussed by many participants. Participants shared that some children in their care had experienced 20 or more moves, which impacted their overall sense of security and also created significant loss every time a move occurred. This confirmed previous research with youths who aged

out of foster care; these youths expressed significant grief and loss when placement disruptions occurred, and the youths had guarded optimism about ever having a stable placement or being able to create secure attachments with caregivers in the future (Unrau et al., 2008). Participants also discussed their feelings of grief and loss, and even guilt, when a placement in their home was disrupted or when they were caring for a child whom they were willing to adopt but the family would step up and be preferred due to federal mandates that place relatives as the first preference for placement. This confirmed previous studies showing that the experience of grief and loss has a significant impact on foster parents and that the system should be more considerate of these impacts and plan better so foster parents have time to adjust and work through placement moves that occur in their home (Newquist et al., 2020).

Theme 5: Building Relationship and Connections

Although the obstacles that are created due to trauma and multiple placement moves are problematic, participants shared a number of ways to overcome these obstacles to allow for healthy attachments and trusting relationships with youths in their care. Previous research indicated that structure, consistency, and stability play a huge role in promoting attachments between youths in foster care and their foster parents (Prather & Golden, 2009). Current participants all reported that having a consistent and structured schedule allows for a sense of stability and security for youths. All participants stated that they work to create structure, consistency, and stability from the first day a youth is placed in their home. One of the participants stated that children placed in out-of-home care need to know the rules and boundaries, and foster parents need to do what they say

they are going to do and keep a routine in place because this allows for children to know what to expect so they can become more comfortable and begin to develop trust with their caregiver. These findings were consistent with what has been found in previous research (Prather & Golden, 2009).

Participants also described how having a positive relationship with birth parents can help the youths placed in their care feel more comfortable and ready to build a trusting relationship, which was not something that had been addressed in previous research related to placement disruptions. One participant shared "the first time we met our foster daughter's birth mom…she hugged me, in front of our foster daughter, and I will never forget when she looked up at me and said, 'oh, you're my mom's friend,' and it was like she instantly trusted me more." This statement was powerful and has important implications for future research, as well as positive social change. All participants shared that positive relationships with birth parents made a significant difference for the children placed in their care. The positive relationships allowed the foster parents to create healthy attachments and relationships with the children placed in their care, which continued after children were reunified with their birth parents.

A finding new to this study is foster parents' experience of social worker turnover. This has a negative impact on foster parent/social worker and youths/social worker relationships and connections, in that existing relationships disrupt, and newly assigned social workers do not have the experience with the foster parents and youth or knowledge about the case, which can impact decision making in the best interest of the child and even cause placement disruptions. While social worker turnover has been the

focus of previous literature (Scales & Quincy, 2020), the impacts of social worker turnover on relationships with foster parents, youths in care, and placement disruptions has not been discussed in previous literature.

Theoretical Framework

The current research study was guided by Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1949), which is the idea that connection to other human beings plays a salient role in child development, personality, and the ability to connect to others across the lifespan. Attachment theory claims that the bond developed between children and their caregivers allows the child to feel a sense of security and stability, that makes the child feel safe, and allows them to develop trusting relationships not only with their caregivers but also with others (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1949; Bowlby, 1988). Attachment theory has important implications for children that have been placed in out-of-home care, as these children have generally experienced significant trauma and disrupted attachments when they were removed from their birth parents due to abuse and neglect issues (Schuengel et al., 2009). Foster parents have obstacles related to attachment that they need to overcome with children placed in their homes, because these children often struggle to create trusting relationships, due to the impacts of the trauma they have experienced (Crum, 2010). Most foster parents have a desire to create healthy connections and trusting relationships with children in their care and they put a lot of time and energy into developing attachments with youths placed in their homes (Crum, 2010).

All participants discussed the importance of making connections with youths placed in their home and had a good understanding of how previous trauma impact a

youth's ability to make important connections to others. Participants shared that they work on building trust with youth immediately when they are placed in their home and felt that creating a safe environment through consistency and stability and helping the youths know exactly what to expect was a very important first step in building trusting relationships that leads to lasting connections. Trust and security are very important elements of attachment theory, as this allows people to feel safe in relationships with others, especially those in caregiving roles (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1949; Bowlby, 1988).

Participants also understood that youths that have been removed from their parents have already experienced broken attachments with whom they trust most, so this creates an obstacle for others that are in caregiving roles when trying to build a relationship. One participant shared that it is extremely important that foster parents keep their word and do what they say they are going to do, as this is key to building trust with youths placed in their home. All participants also shared that demonstrating respect for birth parents and creating positive relationships with them helped youths placed in their home feel more comfortable and secure and also allowed them to develop better and more trusting relationships with the youths that lasted even after youths returned to their parents.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations that exist in the current study due to the very nature of the qualitative research design. IPA does not follow traditional quantitative research norms, which in some ways limits reliability, validity, and generalizability when

compared to a quantitative study (Smith et al., 2012). In the tradition of IPA, the current study focused on trustworthiness in the design to create reliability and validity within the context and parameters set forth in qualitative designs. Themes were developed in the current study that are transferrable, but not generalizable. Transferability does not make broad claims about findings, but instead invites readers into the research to make connections between the research findings and their own experiences **(**Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

The researcher plays an integral role in IPA and is an instrument within the actual study that will approach the research with knowledge, ideas, and even bias associated with previous experiences (Smith et al., 2012). During the current study, I attempted to remain neutral and attend to any potential biases that might have existed due to my own previous experiences. Working in the child welfare system, as well as being a doctoral student in psychology could have caused me to approach and analyze the findings in this study through the lens of those experiences, so another researcher attempting to replicate the current study may have found different themes based on their own experience, education and potential bias.

The current study involved foster parents that live in the northwestern region in the state of Washington, so the results may not be transferrable to other regions in the state of Washington, across the United States, or to other areas of the world. The current study also did not include relative or kinship placement that are caregivers for children in out-of-home care, and their lived experience with placement disruptions could be very

different when compared to foster parents, and this is an area that could be explored further in future studies on placement disruptions.

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, foster parents were experiencing stressors and losses of significant supports that were significant and unprecedented, which could have had an impact on participant responses when compared to foster parents prior to and post the pandemic. Also due to the pandemic, all participant interviews occurred by phone or in a virtual setting. In-person interviews could have created a different interaction between the participants and I that would have allowed for more reflective responses and thicker description.

Recommendations

As previously discussed, research on placement disruptions from the foster parent perspective using a qualitative lens is limited, but it is imperative in order to gain further understanding about the impacts of placement disruptions, as well as new knowledge and ideas about ways to mitigate placement disruptions in the future (Bernedo et al., 2016). Thus, the first recommendation would be to replicate the current study in different areas of the United States or other parts of the world in order to see if the same themes emerge. Since supports might be different in other locations, the specific needs of foster parents might be different, which would also be important to understand to be able to address placement disruptions from differing perspectives.

The current study focused on foster parents, but relatives and suitable other caregivers also take placement of youths placed in out-of-home care, so understanding more about placement disruptions from their perspective would also be important for

future research. This would allow for comparative analysis of the different types of caregivers regarding their experience of placement disruptions.

In the current study, it was noted by all participants that the foster parent's voice often goes unheard in important decisions related to placements for youths in their homes. One way to correct this salient concern would be to give foster parents more of a voice in research that is focused on mitigating placement disruptions for youths in out-of-home care. Further studies that provide the opportunity for foster parents to discuss their experience with placement disruptions could allow foster parents voices to be heard, and it could also provide valuable information to the federal government and child welfare agencies about what supports are needed to mitigate placement disruptions.

There is very limited current research regarding how foster parents experience attachments with youths placed in their care. Because attachment has such significant implications for youths in out-of-home care, and foster parents work hard to find ways to connect with youths in their care, further research focused on how foster parents can create healthy attachments with youths in out-of-home care would be quite beneficial. One of the most significant findings in the current research was that participants shared that building relationships and connections with birth parents helped create stronger attachments with the youth placed in their home. Further, participants stated that contact with birth parents allowed them to create lasting relationships with children and birth parents that extended past reunification, so they were able to continue to be a natural support to the family. It seems that future research focused on enhancing foster parent

connection with youth in their care and birth parents could provide important information about how to mitigate placement disruptions in the future.

Because communication with social workers and social worker turnovers was a key theme in the current study related to placement disruptions, future research dedicated to the social worker's experience with placement disruptions through a qualitative lens could also be quite valuable, as it would allow for further understanding of placement disruptions from the social worker's perspective. It was noted by all participants that social workers played a role in placement disruptions that they experienced, so understanding this dynamic from the social worker's perspective could provide further understanding about how foster parents and social workers could work better to support each other to mitigate placement disruptions for youths in out-of-home care.

Lastly, future qualitative research on placement disruptions should focus on how providing foster parents with information regarding child behaviors and trauma histories, as well as providing training about trauma informed care might enhance foster parent's ability to maintain placements and provide better overall care for the children placed in their homes.

Implications

This research has several important clinical and organizational implications that would allow for positive social change not only for foster parents, but for youths in out-of-home care, birth parents, social workers, and the child welfare system as a whole. Participants discussed what they felt were the major contributing factors to placement

disruptions, as well as multiple factors that increased placement stability, which provides important implications for change.

Some participants shared that they didn't have enough information about behaviors or trauma histories of children placed in their care, which is why some placement disruptions occurred in their homes. Providing the foster parents with information, so they can make a good decision about whether they are able to provide care for a youths is definitely important, as it would allow foster parents to be more prepared and make better decisions about whether youths would be a good fit for their home. This also might cause foster parents to deny taking placement of youths that might have more challenging behaviors. However, according to participants, understanding a youth's trauma history allows for more context regarding child behaviors, and allows foster parents to develop more compassion and understanding for children placed in their home, which, in turn can mitigate placement disruptions for youths in out-of-home care.

Foster parents have far more contact with youths placed in their home than social workers or others that work in the child welfare system, and they have information about day to day life, schedules, and how youths in their care are functioning socially, emotionally, and psychologically, so their input about children placed in their homes is quite valuable and should be heard. Foster parent's knowledge and understanding of youths placed in their home could play an important role in decision making related to the child's best interest. Foster parents can advocate for children in their care based upon their experience and knowledge of caring for the child daily and knowing information about their overall social, emotional, and psychological well-being. They have intimate

knowledge about youth's strengths, interests, behaviors, and needs that comes from being connected to the youth and providing daily care. Teaming with foster parents and communicating more effectively to ensure their voices are heard is important information for social workers to understand, but more importantly it could also make foster parents feel more understood, validated, and valued, which could in turn improve foster parent retention. Child welfare agencies should consider providing a forum for foster parents to provide regular and on-going constructive feedback and suggestions that could support placement stability and enhance the quality of care that is provided to youths in out-of-home placements.

Participants shared that social worker turnover was a significant problem that impacted placement stability and decision making that impacted child well-being, and the overall relationship social workers have with foster parents and youth in care. While social worker retention is not the focus of the current study, the information gleaned from participants demonstrates the impacts that turnover can have on placement disruptions. This is something that needs to be considered and explored more in child welfare, as social worker retention could create positive social change for social workers, foster parents, youths in out-of-home care, and likely the child welfare system as a whole.

Participants shared the importance of specific supports for foster parents in order to mitigate placement disruptions, which included providing regular respite to give foster parents a break, and connecting foster parents to other foster parents. Respite is a way to mitigate foster parent burnout, which can lead to placement disruption, so it is important to build a system of support that allows for regularly scheduled respite. This could

improve placement stability for youths in out-of-home care, and could also improve the overall experience of caregiving for foster parents. Participants shared that foster parents have specific knowledge about the challenges and rewards of caregiving for youths placed in their care that allows them to support each other in a way others aren't able to in child welfare. Having this information can allow child welfare agencies and foster parents to work to ensure that there are ways to connect foster parents to each other, so they have meaningful supports that can impact the foster parent's experience in a positive way, ensure foster parents keep taking placements, and ultimately mitigate placement disruptions for vulnerable youth.

Two of the participants were a part of a specific foster parent model called the Mocking Bird Family Model, and they discussed all the built in supports that this model allows for both foster parents and youth in out-of-home care. This model is built upon the idea of "it takes a village to raise a child," and provides on-going respite, veteran foster parent support, and connection to other foster parents. There is a hub foster home with veteran foster parents that keep beds open for kids, and then a constellation of about 5 to 7 other foster homes, and they meet regularly, sharing meals and caregiving tasks, creating something similar to an extended family network. The participants that were part of this model shared that they were caregivers outside of this model, as well, and the differences for them were significant. They also felt strongly that if more foster parents were a part of the Mocking Bird Family Model it would have a drastic impact on foster parent retention and placement disruptions, which is important to note since this is a model already established within child welfare and could be replicated. This model

provides all the supports that were highlighted in the current study as essential to mitigate

placement disruptions, and if implemented more widely, could create positive change for

foster parents and youths in out-of-home care.

One of the most salient implications for positive change in the current study that

could directly impact placement disruptions, and the overall social, emotional, and

psychological well-being for youths in out-of-home care is foster parent communication

and relationship with birth parents. Participants discussed how creating a positive

relationship with birth parents helped the children in their home feel more comfortable

and connected. They also stated that creating these relationships allowed them to support

birth parents in the process of reunification, and it also allowed for a continued

relationship and connection to both the birth parents and children post reunification.

Connecting birth parents and foster parents from initial placement of children, as long as

it is safe to do so, could create positive social change for foster parents, youth in care, and

birth parents in a way that can create lasting change. The relationship could allow for safe

supports for youths and parents, which might allow the process of reunification to occur

more timely and also help birth parents and children remain connected to safe supports

even after child welfare supports are no longer in place.

Conclusions

This study sought to extend the current literature about placement disruptions for

youths in care from the foster parent's perspective to help determine what are the major

contributing factors for placement disruptions, as well as what might be helpful to

mitigate placement disruptions in the future. The application of IPA in the current study

allowed for detailed and informative responses from foster parents. The five major themes that emerged from the data analysis process is as follows: foster parent support, communication, foster parent training, youth and foster parent trauma, and building relationships and connections. These themes represent suggestions for additional research areas on the topic of placement disruptions in futures studies.

The current study revealed that providing supports to foster parents, such as on-going respite and connection to other foster parents, had a substantial impact on placement stability. I also found that foster parents feel that they need more information about child behavior and trauma history, in order to provide the best quality of care for children placed in their home. Participants noted that having open communication and a positive relationship with birth parents allowed the children in their care to feel more comfortable and connected to foster parents, and also created lasting relationships and connections to children and their birth parents that extends past reunification. Lastly, an unexpected finding in the current study was that social worker turnover had a substantial impact on foster parents and youth in out-of-home placement and was sometimes the cause for placement disruptions. These findings can serve as potential ways to mitigate placement disruptions in the future and create positive social change for youths in care, birth parents, foster parents, social workers, and within the child welfare system as a whole.

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Appendix A: Recruitment of Participants

Study about Placement Disruptions from the Foster Parent's perspective

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experience of placement disruptions from the foster parents' perspective. This study will allow foster parents the opportunity to describe what they feel are the major contributing factors to placement disruptions and discuss what might be helpful to mitigate placement disruptions in the future. I am a doctoral student of Psychology at Walden University. I am conducting this study for my PhD dissertation.

For those interested in participating, interviews will be conducted face-to-face at a pre-determined and convenient location, or using a virtual forum such as Skype or Zoom. The interviews will take no longer than an hour. Your identity will be protected, so all data that is collected and reported will maintain the anonymity of the participant.

You may be eligible to participate in this study if you can answer YES to all of these questions: 1.) I am a licensed foster parent 2.) I have been a licensed foster parent for 3 or more years 3.) I have experienced at least 3 placement disruptions.

If you would like to participate in this study, please email me to express interest. When I received your email, I will send you more detailed information about the study and a consent form that will require your signature. Once the consent for is returned, we will schedule a time for the interview.

Appendix B: Debrief Form

Thank you for your participation in a research study about placement disruptions for youth in care from the perspective of foster parents. This form is a part of the "debriefing' process which provides a reminder of the details of the study and also support information in the event that participation in the study has led to any potential distress.

I am a doctoral student at Walden University am conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of placement disruptions from the perspective of foster parents. In this study, foster parents will have the opportunity to describe the major contributing experiences that lead to placement disruptions, and what could have been helpful to mitigate the placement disruptions they experienced. This study will also explore what foster parents describe as helpful for future efforts to maintain placements for children placed in and out-of-home care.

Privacy:

Reports derived from this study will not reveal or share the identities of participants. Details that might identify the participants, such as the location of the study, will also not be shared. The research will not use any of your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by limiting demographic details such as age and gender. Each participant will receive a number identification and all data will be saved under that identification number. All email communication will be copied into a word document and all identifying information will

be removed and the file will be password protected. All word processing and electronic

files, including audio recordings will be password protected and saved on an encrypted

removable storage device that will be locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home

office when not in use. The data will be kept for the allotted time of five years, as

required by Walden University, and then the drive will be reformatted, safely destroying

all data contained on it.

Limits of Confidentiality:

While privacy is of utmost concern, there are limitations under law. The law lists

several exceptions to the limits of confidentiality including where there is a reasonable

suspicion that there is a danger of violence to self or others, as well as where there is a

reasonable suspicion of child abuse. This means that if one of these exceptions is met, it

is my duty as a mandated reporter to report it to the necessary law enforcement or Child

Protective Services.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study does involve some risks that include minor discomforts

that can be encountered in daily life such as stress, becoming upset, or feeling distress.

However, being in this study will not pose a risk to your safety or overall well-being.

There may be some benefits to the participants, as the information derived from

this study may cause positive change in the foster care system that allows for more

education and support for foster parents to help mitigate placement disruptions for

children in care. This would also benefit youth in foster care that have had to experience

the short and long term impacts of experiencing multiple placement disruption when

placed in out-of-home care. On a larger scale, the child welfare system may benefit from hearing about the lived experience of placement disruptions from the foster parent's experience that will allow for positive social change for children placed in out-of-home care.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask questions prior to participating in the study that you have now, or if you have questions later, you may contact me. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at Walden University. Walden University's approval number for this study is 05-15-20-0104193 and it expires May 14, 2021.

Member Checking:

Once the audio of the interviews has been transcribed, I will be contacting you via email to provide you with a summary of your responses. This will allow you the opportunity to ensure your views have been accurately reflected, as well as provide you the opportunity to clarify any information regarding your responses, if needed.

Sources of Support:

When participating in research, there is always a slight possibility that participants might experience psychological distress which can include negative moods, anxiety and/or stress due to the arduous nature of being interviewed and disclosing personal information and details about your own experiences. If you feel as though you need any additional support, please contact the services below:

- Mental health emergency, call 911

- National Suicide Prevention Hotline, call 800-273-8255

- Mental Health Crisis Lines for Washington State, by county, can be found at the following website: https://www.hca.wa.gov/health-care-services-supports/behavioral-health-recovery/mental-health-crisis-lines