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Perceptions of Human Services Case Workers Regarding Culturally Sensitive, Evidence-Based Services in Child Welfare

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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John Dyrkacz

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Perceptions of Human Services Case Workers Regarding Culturally Sensitive, Evidence-
Based Services in Child Welfare

by

John Dyrkacz

MA, Walden University, 2019

MA, Webster University, 2008

BS, The Union Institute and University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human and Social Services

Walden University

November 2022

Abstract

The perceptions of human services case workers toward their racial minority clients may affect the quality of service that racial minority families who are involved in the child welfare system receive. In the child welfare system, some African American families are not offered services that are culturally sensitive or tailored to their race or ethnicity. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American and racial minority clients in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. Family systems theory was used to frame this study. Semistructured telephonic interviews were conducted with 12 human services case workers. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and hand coded for analysis using Saldana's inductive coding process. Ten themes were identified: (a) importance of cultural competency, (b) effective evidence-based services, (c) human services case workers' bias, (d) lack of diversity in human services case workers, (e) cultural upbringing and environment, (f) Families First Act and African American clients, (g) cultural awareness and sensitivity training, (h) lack of trust in human services case workers, (i) rural versus urban areas and population, and (j) trust and rapport building. This study may promote positive social change by providing a better understanding of human services case workers' perceptions and their experiences of offering culturally appropriate and evidence-based services to African American and racial minority families.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Jannifer David, who supported me and stood by me through every single step of this journey; to my daughter, Tashianna Torres; to my family; and to human services case workers whose job at keeping children safe may seem insurmountable at times.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The perceptions of human services case workers toward their clients may affect the children and families whom they serve. Human services case workers often serve marginalized families and individuals who are at their most vulnerable when they are involved in the child welfare system (Gourdine, 2019). These marginalized families may have their own cultural traditions, beliefs, and value systems that may differ from their human services case worker (Richard & Lee, 2019). Human services case workers and social workers can provide culturally informed services to all individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, or mental or physical ability (National Association of Social Workers, 2021). Human services case workers may not offer culturally competent or evidence-based services to their clients due to the characteristics of the family (Richard & Lee, 2019). However, there may be problems in providing culturally competent and evidence-based services from human services case workers. There was limited research on providing culturally competent and evidence-based services to clients as it pertains to human services case workers practicing in the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States.

The results of this study may be used to improve the cultural awareness and the delivery of evidence-based services by human services case workers in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. child welfare system. The results of this study may lead to positive social change by increasing the cultural awareness of human services case workers. Culturally sensitive, evidence-based services can be used to serve the needs of families involved with the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the

United States. In Chapter 1, I present how using culturally sensitive, evidence-based services by human services case workers may improve the outcomes for their clients in the child welfare system. This chapter presents this study's background, problem statement, purpose, research question, framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, and the summary.

Background

Many human services case workers in the child welfare system want to promote child safety, well-being, and permanency. Historically, once families become involved in the child welfare system (whether through voluntary services, court-ordered services, or children removed from their parent's homes), human services case workers are assigned to families to offer services (Fong, 2017). Human services case workers create case plans that are the blueprint of the tasks and goals that parents need to complete for their children to safely remain in their home or for the reunification of the children with their parents (Fluke et al., 2016; Fong, 2017). Human services case workers can provide evidence-based, culturally appropriate services to improve services to families involved in the child welfare system. If human services professionals do not offer evidence-based, culturally appropriate services, they may not be adequately servicing their clients (Olcoń, 2019). When human services case workers do not offer evidence-based, culturally appropriate services to their clients, they may provide inadequate services to the children and families involved in the child welfare system (Gourdine, 2019). Culturally appropriate, evidence-based services can afford families the opportunities to address the needs that brought them into the child welfare system and achieve the goals that are

required by their human service case workers (Olcoń, 2019). Human services workers can tailor their services to all of the families and clients they serve.

African American families and other racial minority families involved in the child welfare system may feel that they do not receive adequate services. In addition, these families may feel that they have been marginalized and discriminated against by their human services case worker (Olcoń, 2019). Structural barriers such as lack of cultural awareness of social workers, institutional racism, and lack of adequate resources that serve diverse populations may prevent African American and other racial minority families from receiving culturally sensitive, evidence-based services (Garcia et al., 2019; Olcoń, 2019). When the human service case workers desire to treat all clients the same, the delivery of services may not be effective (Gourdine, 2019). The lack of cultural competence and misunderstanding among human services case workers, coupled with high caseloads, may contribute to human services case workers not offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to racial minority families, which may create adverse outcomes (Cénat et al., 2021). The adverse outcomes that may occur when services are not evidence based and culturally appropriate include children encountering unsafe situations in their homes, children being placed outside of their homes with relatives, or children being placed in foster care (Cénat et al., 2021). Often when racial minority children are removed from their homes, they may not be reunified with their parents and may remain in foster care much longer (Lovato-Hermann et al., 2017). By offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services that are geared toward the individual family and client, human services case workers can build trust and

understanding that improves the relationship between the client and the human services case worker.

When families become involved with the child welfare system due to neglect and/or child abuse, the Department of Human Services may become responsible for ensuring the safety, well-being, and permanency for the children in the home. Human services case workers are responsible for ensuring safety within the family (King et al., 2017). One way for the human services worker to work in partnership with the family is to build trust and rapport between themselves and the family (Alvarez-Hernandez & Choi, 2017; Olcoń, 2019). Garcia et al. (2019) highlighted the need to implement evidence-based services to build relationships with families and develop services that adequately serve racially and ethnically diverse populations. Culturally appropriate, evidence-based services can provide families with the necessary tools and opportunities to address the needs that brought them into the child welfare system and achieve the goals that are required by their human services case workers (Olcoń, 2019). Families who are not afforded the opportunity to address their needs through culturally appropriate, evidence-based services may struggle throughout their time in the child welfare system. Child safety and well-being may not be accomplished, leading to children being removed from their parent's care.

There was a gap in knowledge regarding how human services case workers' perceptions and attitudes toward providing culturally appropriate, evidence-based services may impact their actions, intentions, and behaviors while providing services to their African American and racial minority clients (Garcia et al., 2019). Further research

to fill this gap in knowledge was warranted. The current study was needed to explore whether the use of culturally appropriate and evidence-based services by human services case workers can help reduce the lack of equality of African American and racial minority families in the child welfare system.

Problem Statement

In the child welfare system, some African American families are offered services that are not culturally tailored to race and ethnicity. Human services case workers who do not provide culturally appropriate services to African American families involved in child welfare may provide inadequate services to their clients (Gourdine, 2019). These inadequate services may lead to African American children being removed from their parents. Once removed, these children may not be reunified with their parents in a timely manner, and African American children may remain in foster care longer (Lovato-Hermann et al., 2017). Human services case workers may not offer culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to American Africans families in the child welfare system because they may not believe that their clients' problems can be solved. Alternatively, the client may refuse to work with the human services case worker (Akin et al., 2016; Cénat et al., 2021; Lovato-Hermann et al., 2017; Richard & Lee, 2019). African American families may be negatively impacted when not offered culturally sensitive, evidence-based services by their human services case worker.

Human services case workers may benefit their African American clients by offering culturally sensitive, evidence-based services. Human services case workers can tailor their evidence-based services and referrals to incorporate cultural awareness for

services such as poverty, parenting, mental health issues, and substance abuse treatment (Cheng & Lo, 2018). Culturally appropriate services allow families to address the needs that brought them into the child welfare system and achieve goals that are required by their human services case workers (Olcoń, 2019). Often the cultural competence of the human services case worker determines the racial minority clients' satisfaction level (Carmack & Ahmed, 2019). When the human services case workers provide African American and other racial minority clients culturally appropriate services, the clients' outcomes are more likely to improve (Azzopardi, 2020). There is a positive link between African American and other racial minority clients' perception of the human services case workers' cultural competence and clients' improvements in their social interactions, home performance, and management of life problems (Olcoń, 2019). A positive relationship between human services case workers and African American and other racial minority clients may improve the level of success for the clients.

Although there was research on the issues concerning African American children in the child welfare system, including sociodemographic and racial discrimination, there was a need to explore the perceptions of human services case workers and the culturally appropriate and evidence-based services as factors that may influence the provision of services. Lovato-Hermann et al. (2017) explored whether the race or ethnicity of the clients influenced the human services case workers regarding the types of services that were referred to the client through the eyes and perception of the clients. Olcoń (2019) explored the perceptions of racial minority clients who stated that they experienced marginalization, discrimination, and bias from human services case workers. Olcoń

determined that there were structural barriers such as human services case workers' lack of cultural awareness and institutional racism. Garcia et al. (2019) explored implementing evidence-based services in the child welfare system with diverse populations and determined that there are multiple challenges with implementing evidence-based practice interventions. Garcia et al. stated that child welfare directors and scholars need to overcome their differences in the intervention outcomes goals to decrease child behavior problems or promote child safety and permanence. Garcia et al. further determined the need for better engagement with families and for case workers to refer African American and racial minority families to evidence-based services. Lastly, Garcia et al. determined the need for better trained, culturally competent case workers, community partners, and service providers.

Although scholars have explored issues concerning culturally appropriate and evidence-based services, I found no literature that addressed the human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to African American families in the child welfare system to improve family care services. According to Garcia et al. (2019), there is a gap in the literature regarding how human services case workers' attitudes and perceptions toward evidence-based practices and services impact their actions, intentions, and behaviors in providing culturally appropriate services to improve services offered to families. In the current study, I aimed to fill the gap in the literature regarding how the perceptions of human services case workers providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to their African American clients may improve services offered to the families in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the

United States. The results from this study provided information that may assist other human services case workers, as well as gain support of the stakeholders and community partners, in promoting culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to African American families.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States to improve services offered to families. The population for this basic qualitative study was 12 nonlicensed human services case workers who developed case plans and offered services to African American families involved in the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. The in-depth semistructured telephonic interviews were conducted with participants who served African American families in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. This study contributed to filling the gap in the literature regarding how the perceptions of human services case workers providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to their African American clients may improve services offered to the families. The study may also help increase the knowledge of other human services case workers and stakeholders in improving services to African American. Through provision of information on the benefits of using culturally sensitive, evidence-based services and referrals, African American families may be better served and child safety and well-being could be improved in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States.

Research Question

What are nonlicensed human services case workers' perceptions of providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to African American families and children in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. child welfare system to improve services to families?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the family systems theory. M. Bowen created the family systems theory in 1966 to examine family functioning. The six original tenets of Bowen's family systems theory included differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family emotional system, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, and sibling position (M. Bowen, 1966). M. Bowen added two additional tenets to the family systems theory in 1976 to include emotional cutoff and societal emotional process. When exposed to each tenet, family members experience anxiety at different levels, and prolonged exposure to anxiety can cause stress and family dysfunction (M. Bowen, 1966). Human services case workers engage with families where abuse or neglect has occurred. Sometimes, these families are experiencing various levels of family dysfunction. When a human services case worker enters the family dynamic, there may be new stressors and anxiety for that family in the tenets of emotional cutoff and societal emotional process. Introducing a new person in the family dynamic can either hinder the emotional system or improve and change the emotional system in the family. Human services case workers who offer culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to the family may help to promote a successful introduction into the family.

Family systems theory was chosen as the conceptual framework for this study due to the similarities in the structure, functions, and capacity of the child welfare system and family systems. Child welfare is a system for human services case workers that is based on perceptions, boundaries, and relationships that align with the family systems theory (Thompson et al., 2019). The relationship between a human services case worker and their client may be a factor in deciding the client's success or failure in the child welfare system (Thompson et al., 2019). One of the tenets of family systems theory was to work with the family as a group, which allows individuals in the family to resolve their problems (M. Bowen, 1966). Human services case workers can work within families to keep children safe by offering culturally appropriate services to families in the child welfare system (Olcoń, 2019). Family systems theory was a useful model for understanding the perceptions of human services case workers in providing culturally appropriate services to clients to improve family services, as well as an appropriate lens for understanding their roles in their involvement with the family. The relationship between the human services case workers and the family is an integral part in assessing the family dynamic and the family functioning system. Family systems theory was used in this study as a lens to explore human services case workers' perception and relationship with their clients.

Nature of the Study

The research design for this study was a generic qualitative design. In a generic design approach, the researcher can examine the participants' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of their personal experiences in the real world (Novak et al., 2021; Percy et al.,

2015). According to Kahlke (2018), generic qualitative approaches allow the researcher to be more flexible and less pedantic and offer more creativity with alignment in their research design. Researchers may use a generic qualitative design to acquire data about participants' perceptions of their experiences by stimulating the participants' ideas and responses from the experiences on a specific topic (Novak et al., 2021). According to Powell and Thomas (2021), a generic qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand the participants' subjective opinions and their reflections of their real-world experiences by accentuating the participants' perceptions and feelings as opposed to the actual meaning of their experiences. I selected the generic qualitative approach because the purpose of the study was to understand the perceptions of human services case workers who may be providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to African American families and children in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. child welfare system to improve services to families.

In this study, I explored human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to improve services to families. I used purposeful sampling to gain information-rich data from the population who had central knowledge and information on the phenomenon (see Novak et al., 2021; Powell & Thomas 2021). I gained access to the participants by recruiting current, nonlicensed human services case workers in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States who had provided service to African American families. I recruited the participants using social media work groups on various social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. I joined several private social media work groups on Facebook

and posted flyers during the recruitment period on social media. I emailed the potential participants and then followed up with a telephone call to each potential participant. The data were collected through in-depth semistructured telephonic interviews of the population who had served African American families in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. I analyzed the patterns, codes, and themes presented in the data from the participants' interviews.

Definitions

Culturally sensitive services/culturally appropriate services: Services that connect to clients of different ethnicities and divert attention from issues of power and oppression (Colvin et al., 2020).

Evidence-based services: Evidence-based service is a process in which the human services case worker combines well-researched interventions with clinical experience, ethics, client preferences, and culture to guide and inform the delivery of treatments and services (Landers et al., 2018).

Human services case workers: Human services case workers assist clients in solving and managing problems and crises that occur in their lives. In the child welfare system, human services case workers are trained to help their clients improve their developmental capabilities, problem-solving skills, and coping mechanisms, all while being responsible for the safety and well-being of the children (Perez-Jolles et al., 2019).

Assumptions

The participants of this study were current, nonlicensed human services case workers in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States who had provided

multiple services to their clients. In this study, I assumed that the participants were knowledgeable about providing culturally appropriate services to their clients so that they could provide me with data to answer the research question. In addition, I assumed that the participants were honest and provided me with their authentic perceptions of offering culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to their clients. Lastly, I assumed that the participants understood the questions as I intended.

Scope and Delimitations

The population of this study was delimited to human services case workers who were employed by the Department of Human Services in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. I delimited participation to human services case workers who were offering either voluntary or court-ordered services to their clients. I did not explore social workers' perceptions or the perceptions of the families who were receiving services.

Other theories were considered for the conceptual framework for this study, including critical race theory and social cognitive theory. Critical race theorists seek to understand how existing power structures and racism are entrenched in U.S. society (Dixon, 2018; Kolivoski et al., 2014). Critical race theory is a framework that researchers can use to understand, recognize, and analyze the power dynamics that sustain institutional racism and its oppressive effects in society (Dixon, 2018; Kolivoski et al., 2014). Critical race theorists analyze how racism is embedded into the foundation of U.S. life (Dixon, 2018; Kolivoski et al., 2014; Reece, 2019). The purpose of the current study was to explore human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients and not

how racism and oppression creates inequality in the child welfare system; therefore, I did not choose critical race theory as my conceptual framework.

Social cognitive theory provides a framework for understanding the relationship between social services and child maltreatment. According to social cognitive theory, changes in the client's environment through the availability of human services case workers produces increased social support for the client, which leads changes in client's behavior that may decrease child abuse and neglect of the children in the family (Negash & Maguire, 2016; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Social cognitive theory was not chosen for the current study because clients' behaviors may not change due to human services case workers being involved in the clients' lives without culturally sensitive, evidence-based services being offered to clients.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included my previous experience that may have led to potential bias while collecting and analyzing the data. Because I had been in the child welfare field for 19 years, mainly as child protection supervisor, I had preconceived ideas about how the lack of cultural awareness had a negative effect on clients. To mitigate my bias, I bracketed my biases by outlining my preconceived ideas about the topic in my research journal. According to Meyer and Willis (2019), biases in qualitative research may not be eliminated; however, the researcher's goal is to reduce biases through awareness, purpose, and practice. I reduced my bias by being aware of my assumptions and the implications for the participants; my purpose was to reduce bias by reflecting on

my assumptions and my practice by using reflexive journaling (see Meyer & Willis, 2019).

An additional limitation that may have been related to the generic qualitative design of this study was that participants may not have been completely honest in their responses regarding their experiences and perceptions about this topic (see Novak et al., 2021). To mitigate this limitation, I reminded each participant of the consent form that they reviewed which included information about participants' confidentiality, the importance of the study, and scientific integrity, in an attempt to encourage participants to respond honestly regarding their experiences and perceptions about this topic.

Another limitation was the ability to establish dependability in this qualitative study (see Eldh et al., 2020). To establish dependability, I maintained a detailed audit trail (see Kozleski, 2017). Another limitation was the collecting of data through telephonic interviewing due to the COVID-19 pandemic as opposed to direct observation and face-to-face interviews that represent the bedrocks of qualitative interviewing. Face-to-face interviews may produce honest perceptions on a topic by building trust with the participants (see Krouwel et al., 2019). To mitigate this limitation, I shared information about myself to establish rapport, and used vocalizations, clarification comments, and requests to promote responsiveness and acknowledge the value of participants' responses (see Archibald et al., 2019). When a researcher builds rapport with the participants, the participants are more likely to respond with honest answers that are rich and detailed and that honestly reflect their personal experiences and perceptions (Novak et al., 2021).

Another limitation of the current qualitative study was that participants reported perceptions and experiences that could not be proven.

Significance

The results of this study may be used to address the gap in the literature by exploring nonlicensed human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients in the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States to improve services to families. The results of this study may improve the cultural awareness and communication between African American families and the human services case workers, as well as the decision makers in the welfare system. Human services case workers may improve their practice by improving their cultural awareness and communication, which may build trust and understanding that benefits both the client and the human services case worker. Human services case workers may have improved confidence and competence levels when their relationship with clients is built on trust and not power. The results of this study may lead to positive social change by increasing the cultural awareness of human services case workers. Using culturally sensitive evidence-based services to serve the needs of African American children in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States may lead to increased reunification of African American children with their parents due to their involvement in the child welfare system.

Summary

The results of this study may address the gap in the literature by exploring nonlicensed human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients in the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. The population for this basic qualitative study included nonlicensed human services case workers who had developed case plans and offered services to African American families involved in the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. The findings of this study may be used to improve the cultural awareness and communication between families and the human services case workers, as well as the decision makers in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. child welfare system. The results of this study may also lead to positive social change by increasing the cultural awareness of human services case workers through the use culturally sensitive, evidence-based services as a tool to service the needs of African American families who are involved with the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States.

In this chapter, I outlined the need for further study concerning the perceptions of human services case worker in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. child welfare system. I presented the introduction, background of the study, problem statement, purpose, research question, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance. In Chapter 2, I provide a concise synopsis of the current literature that established the relevance of the

problem. I present the literature search strategy, conceptual framework, and literature review related to key concepts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Human services case workers face the task of attempting to keep children safe in their homes and keep their families intact. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS] accepted over 2.3 million cases of child abuse and neglect for investigation in the United States (HHS, 2018). Children were the reported victims in over 677,529 reports in 2016 (HHS, 2018). In 2016, the number of children in foster care totaled over 273,539 (HHS, 2018). Human services case workers face the task of accessing culturally appropriate and evidence-based services for their African American clients and children in the child welfare system.

The current study was conducted in an Upper Midwest urban setting where the African American population represented only 4.2% of the general population; however, 28% of the children placed in foster care were African American (Breakthrough Series Collaborative, 2016). In July 2017, this Upper Midwest state population was 91% European American, 6% Hispanic American, 3.8% African American, and 1.9% of two or more races (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Of the children who were in out-of-home settings, 13% were African American, and 11% were of two or more races (Child Welfare League of America, 2017). African American children were being removed from their parent's homes and placed in foster care at a rate that exceeded that of European American children.

There was a need for systemic changes in the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States, especially to incorporate culturally sensitive, evidence-based services for families involved in the child welfare system. Human

services case workers work to keep the children referred to human services safe and well (Myers et al., 2019). Human services case workers assess child safety and provide interventions, treatment plans, and services for children to remain safely in their homes and secure stable placement when placed out of their homes (Perez-Jolles et al., 2019). However, when human service workers do what is expected of them when working with their clients, their performance may nevertheless be deemed inadequate by the stakeholders, mandated reporters, and upper management of child welfare organizations (Pryce et al., 2019). Human services case workers' actions may be questioned when the safety, permanency, and well-being of children are not achieved promptly despite the barriers of high caseloads, high turnover of coworkers, and poor client participation in services that some human services case workers face (de Guzman et al., 2020; Wilke et al., 2018). Human services case workers can reduce barriers between themselves and the clients they serve by offering evidence-based services that are culturally sensitive.

Chapter 2 includes the introduction, literature search strategy, conceptual framework, evidence-based services, Safecare, Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (Secondary) Programs, reunification programs, Positive Parenting Program (Triple P), benefits of evidence-based practices. Furthermore, Chapter 2 addresses the challenges of evidence-based practices, cultural sensitivity, children who identify as LGBTQ+, teenage pregnancy, and noncustodial fathers. The chapter also includes a conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

My search for literature on this research topic targeted scholarly articles obtained from the Walden University Library and Google Scholar. I conducted literature searches

using the following databases: SocINDEX with Full Text, Social Work Abstracts, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, SAGE Journals, EBSCOhost, Counseling Database, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. I focused on literature published between 2016 and 2022 using various keywords including *social workers*, *human service case workers*, *cultural awareness*, *culturally sensitive*, *evidence-based services*, *services*, *child welfare*, *bias*, and *family systems theory*. I found older references while reviewing the literature and used some seminal literature in this literature review. I identified over 1,750 scholarly articles in this search and cited over 245 scholarly articles in this study.

Conceptual Framework

I used M. Bowen's (1966) family systems theory to explore the perceptions of human services case workers working with families who are involved with the child welfare system. According to family systems theory, families are an intertwined system, and within a family there are complex subsystems that follow the same rules (M. Bowen, 1966; Minuchin, 1985). M. Bowen stated that a family function is a system; each family member plays a unique role, and family members follow specific rules. Family members are expected to interact with and respond to one another in a certain way. When patterns develop within the system, each member's behaviors impact other members in predictable ways.

Furthermore, the family is an emotional unit, and any change in the emotional functioning of one member of the emotional unit is balanced by changes in the emotional functioning of other members (M. Bowen, 1966). The actions of each member influence

the family system, and the system is constantly changing, seeking stability (M. Bowen, 1966; Minuchin, 1985; Rothbaum et al., 2002). Family members are interconnected emotionally to one another, and family systems theory provides insight into how a family functions, such as behavioral and emotional patterns that exist within the family unit.

First Tenet of Family Systems Theory

One of M. Bowen's (1966) basic tenets of the family systems theory is the nuclear family emotional system. Systems theorists describe the nuclear family emotional system as the relationship patterns that govern where problems develop in a family (M. Bowen, 1966). People's attitudes and beliefs about relationships play a role in their relationship patterns, but the forces driving them are a part of the emotional system (M. Bowen, 1966). The relationship patterns result in family tensions in certain parts of the family (M. Bowen, 1966). Another central concept of the family system theory is the undifferentiated family ego mass (M. Bowen, 1966). According to M. Bowen, undifferentiated family ego mass is the gathering of a family's emotional oneness that occurs in all degrees of intensity in a family, ranging from the highest degree of most intense to the lowest degree of being unnoticeable. Within a nuclear family, an emotional process continually shifts in the family ego mass in distinct patterns of emotional responsiveness. The level of involvement in the family ego mass of any one member of the family depends on its degree of intensity. During high stress and high intensity, the process may involve all nuclear family members, extended family members, nonfamily members, and representatives of social service agencies and the courts. The possibility of

children being unsafe or child abuse occurring in families exists during this period of emotional responsiveness.

Second Tenet of Family Systems Theory

The second tenet of M. Bowen's (1966) family systems theory I applied in this study was differentiation of self. M. Bowen (1978) stated that the primary concepts within the family systems theory focus on anxiety and integration of self. The differentiation of self is an individual's ability to maintain a strong sense of their identity when interacting with others (Knauth, 2003; Thompson et al., 2019). According to M. Bowen (1978), differentiated individuals can build healthy, helpful relationships that balance their needs for intimacy and independence, while individuals who are not well differentiated will experience personal difficulties such as conflict with others and high levels of anxiety. M. Bowen (1978) stated that child abuse is a facet of family functioning created by the insufficient emotional separation between family members and their ability to act from values and morality instead of emotional reaction.

The differentiation of self is an aspect of healthy family development. The differentiation of self has been linked to child abuse because several perceptions related to differentiation of self, including lower emotional reactivity, emotional cutoff, and enmeshment with others, predict a lower risk for child abuse (Skowron et al., 2010; Skowron & Platt, 2005). However, a lack of differentiation can also be attributed to chronic abuse when the interplay between a lack of differentiation and an ability to work through relational difficulties leads to a continual cycle of increased reactivity, which perpetuates child abuse (Stith et al., 2009; Timmer et al., 2002). The occurrence of child

abuse in families may be reduced when parents achieve higher levels of differentiation of self. Parents may be less emotionally reactive, which allows them to better regulate their emotions. By regulating their emotions, parents may think more clearly during times of stress and maintain a clear sense of self in the family system, which may allow them to remain emotionally connected to their children.

When human services case workers become involved in the family dynamic, they should assess the family's functioning. Human services case workers should be aware of clients who have trouble parenting or who have physically abused their children and may not have a strong sense of self when interacting with them (Skrowron et al., 2010; Stith et al., 2009; Timmer et al., 2002). Parents with difficulties normalizing their emotions have a lower threshold for dealing with parenting stressors. This lower threshold may result in the perpetration of physical abuse or neglect of children (Brown, 1999; Thompson et al., 2019). Human services case workers must recognize the differentiation of self of the family members not only to ascertain the barriers of the family to work with services but also to predict future child abuse or neglect.

Third Tenet of Family Systems Theory

The third tenet of M. Bowen's (1966) family systems theory I applied in the current study was triangles. According to M. Bowen (1966), triangles occur in a dyadic relationship when a third member is introduced to reduce conflict or anxiety between the other two primary unit members. The relationship between the mother and the father impacts the parent and child relationship (Korja et al., 2016). Furthermore, the mother's perceived satisfaction level in the marriage determines whether the child is a victim of

triangulation (Korja et al., 2016). M. Bowen (1966) stated that children could serve as the triangle between the parents to reduce marital strife in the family subsystem. M. Bowen (1978) also stated that the triangle is a system of relationships among three people, and when chronic anxiety is high, the triangle can become more intense. Triangles are associated with M. Bowen's concept of differentiation; when there is a higher degree of fusion in a relationship, the person with the higher level of intensity will create the triangle to preserve emotional stability (Brown, 1999; Lundahl et al., 2006). Triangles tend to occur in families when stress levels are high and families have the need to reduce conflicts and anxiety (Brown, 1996). Triangles can occur regularly within the child welfare system (Thompson et al., 2019; Thompson & Colvin, 2017). In a nuclear family, there is a triangle within the family. The triangle may change when a human services case worker becomes involved in the family. The first change may include introducing the human services case worker in the family triangle.

The role of human services case workers is to protect children from abuse and neglect and to keep them safe in their homes when families are involved with the child welfare system. Triangles occur when a human services case worker becomes involved in the family and there was previously only a symbiotic relationship between the parent and the child; the human services case worker becomes responsible for regulating the tasks of the parent and controlling the interactions between the parent and the child (Klever, 2009; Thompson et al., 2019). Triangles can lead to conflicts and problems within the family as parents who are generally responsible for the conflict or issue do not accept the responsibility, and that responsibility may be shifted to the human services case worker

(Klever, 2009; Thompson et al., 2019). Human services case workers should avoid taking on the role of the responsible person or primary role in the triangle because the issues or abuse that brought the human services case worker into the household should be resolved by the parents (Klever, 2009; Thompson et al., 2019). The role of the human services case worker is to provide oversight and offer appropriate services to the family. Family systems theory addresses human behavior that considers the family as an emotional unit (M. Bowen, 1966). When human services case workers work with a family, they may need to check their emotions to avoid taking the family's behavior personally.

Barriers for Human Services Case Workers Using Family Systems Theory

Human services case workers should be prepared to face barriers when engaging with a family. One of the initial barriers to overcome is a power struggle in the family (Thompson et al., 2019). Once a human services case worker becomes involved with a family, there is usually a shift in power, with the human services case worker becoming the authoritative figure for the household (Holt & Kelly, 2016; Mackenzie et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2019). It is natural for difficulties to arise in the family system when the parents' role may be diminished by the human services case worker, who may inadvertently undermine the parent's authority (Holt & Kelly, 2016; Mackenzie et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2019). Power struggles may occur when a new person is introduced into a family, and a human services case worker should strive to recognize and understand the power struggle.

When human services case workers become closely involved, changes within the family may occur. Human services case workers' roles of keeping children safe are often

multiplied as the parents' divorce, separate, or become widowed, creating extended families or multiple households where the child lives (Fong, 2017; Kim & Drake, 2018). According to DeLongis and Zwicker (2017), 40% to 50% of parents' first marriage ends in divorce. Furthermore, 70% to 80% of people will remarry following a divorce or the death of a spouse (DeLongis & Zwicker, 2017). It is common for triangles to occur due to divorce. Triangulation occurs in the divorce process when the divorced spouses bring the children into an interpersonal struggle with the other spouse (Fong, 2017; Kim & Drake, 2018). When spouses are alienated, triangulation occurs if the spouses refuse to employ a healthy coparenting style (Petren et al., 2017). Triangles will also occur when ex-spouses attempt to undermine each other, including criticizing one another in front of the children or engaging in violent or hostile behaviors against each other (Fong, 2017). The triangulation of the ex-spouses harms the children's social functioning (M. Bowen, 1976; Fosco & Bray, 2016; Lamela et al., 2016; Petren et al., 2017). Human services case workers may need to be prepared to understand the triangulation that may occur in estranged families and offer appropriate evidence-based services to parents so that effective coparenting can occur.

Application of Family Systems Theory in the Current Study

Family systems theory provided a useful model for understanding the perceptions of human services case workers when providing culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to clients, and was an appropriate lens for understanding their roles in their involvement with the family. Family systems theory was chosen as the conceptual framework for the current study because human services case workers work within a

child welfare organization in which hierarchies, structures, capacity, and functions are similar to a family structure. The human services case workers' understanding of their clients may be found in their perceptions, boundaries, and relationships with their clients (Thompson et al., 2019). The human services case workers' perceptions of providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to African American families are integral in serving and helping the family dynamic and functioning system.

Literature Review

The perceptions of human services workers in the child welfare field affect the children and their families that human service workers serve. Researchers who have studied the child welfare system have mainly focused on the children and their families rather than human service workers (Lovato-Hermann et al., 2017). However, human service workers' perceptions of their clients can directly affect the outcome of the services and how children will either remain safely in the house or be placed in an out-of-home setting. The perceptions of human service workers begin with their careers in the child welfare system (de Guzman et al., 2020). Human services workers' perceptions can be affected by high caseloads, poor pay, high turnover, poor supervision, lack of support, policy and procedure of their organizations, lack of advancement, uncooperative and hostile parents and families, lack of appropriate services to offer families, and working with victims of child abuse (Barbee et al., 2018; de Guzman et al., 2020; Richardson & Yates, 2019). The sections below discuss factors that affect human service professionals' ability to provide adequate services to families.

Turnover

The turnover rate of human services workers affects both their clients and fellow human services workers. The turnover rate of human services workers is high within the child welfare field (de Guzman et al., 2020; Wilke et al., 2018). According to Richardson and Yates (2019), approximately 25% of human services workers leave their jobs within 1 year, and open job vacancy rates average nearly 10% annually. Furthermore, on average, human services workers stay at their jobs for less than two years (Benton, 2017; Griffiths et al., 2017; Griffiths & Royse, 2017; He et al., 2018). The human services workers' turnover rates exceed a healthy organization's average turnover of 10% to 12% (Barbee et al., 2018). The high turnover of human services workers leads to an increased caseload burden on the remaining human services workers (de Guzman et al., 2020). The human service workers who remain on the job are faced with overwhelming caseloads and clients who are now required to deal with a new human services worker who may duplicate services for clients. The new human services workers' presence may negatively affect the clients' and human services workers' relationship and directly affect the children's safety.

Human services workers experience high caseloads due to staff turnover and insufficient salaries. Human services workers in the child welfare field are underpaid compared to other frontline professionals (de Guzman et al., 2020; He et al., 2018; Park & Pierce, 2020). Human services workers who stay on the job may experience decreased job satisfaction, which creates higher turnover rates, lower salaries, or decreased satisfaction with contingent rewards, leading to poor employee retention (Park & Pierce,

2020). Lower pay and high caseloads lead to decreased job satisfaction in the human services profession.

Lack of Advancement

Another issue that leads to decreased job satisfaction for human services workers is the lack of advancement. The availability of promotion and career development is low in the child welfare field, which makes some human services workers feel restricted, limited in advancement opportunities, and underappreciated, which leads to turnover and a shortage of trained and skilled human services workers (Curry, 2019). Additionally, the values of the human service workers and the values of their child welfare organization's policy and procedure may not be aligned in terms of promotion and compensation, leading some human services workers to feel unappreciated and undervalued (Curry, 2019; Lawrence et al., 2019). The negative perceptions of human services workers begin within their child welfare organization (Curry, 2019). Without organizational improvements to increase employee retention, human services workers' turnover rate, salary, support, recognition, values, and opportunity for advancement, some human services workers may not be able to maintain a positive perception toward their clients.

Evidence-Based Services

Human service workers employ evidence-based services better to serve each client's unique individual circumstances and issues when involved in the child welfare system. Evidenced-based services are interventions where human service case workers combine well-researched interventions with clinical experience, ethics, client preferences, and culture to guide and inform the delivery of treatments and services to an individual

client's needs (Akin et al., 2016; Landers et al., 2018). The purpose of offering evidence-based is to integrate evidence into the human services workers' practice by considering the client's needs, wishes, and values while combining the human services workers' clinical expertise in the child welfare field (Myers et al., 2019). Landers et al. (2018) contended that using evidence-based programs in child welfare improves the outcomes for children and families. Evidence-based services address the clients' specific condition, coupled with the human services worker's expertise, to seek potential solutions to the condition.

Barriers to Implementing Evidence-Based Services for Child Welfare Organizations

An evidence-based service model in the child welfare field uses researched and verified methods by a human services worker to create or enhance treatment plans to help clients. Evidence-based service models have been used in the child welfare system since the 1990s; however, their success has been limited due to multiple implementation barriers from child welfare organizations (Garcia et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2020). According to Garcia et al. (2018), one of the most significant barriers to the implementation of evidence-based services is the inability of the child welfare agency's upper management to access and understand evidence about their target population. A second barrier to implementing evidence-based services is human services workers' concerns that evidence-based services diminish their relationship with clients, limit the human services worker's independence, and limit their creativity in working with clients (Akin et al., 2018). A third barrier to implementing evidence-based services is that evidence-based services tend to individualize solutions using best practices, as opposed to

examining the systemic factors of the client, such as poverty (Akin et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2020). A fourth barrier to implementing evidence-based services is that evidence-based services lack transferability from one culture to another especially that of minority cultures (Garcia et al., 2018). Evidence-based services have been effective with European American families; however, there are concerns that evidence-based services may not transfer adequately to minority cultures without using culturally sensitive evidence-based services.

Barriers to Implementing Evidence-Based Services for Clients

There are perceived barriers that clients have in receiving evidence-based services. Some clients perceive that evidence-based services may benefit European American families rather than African American families (Mersky et al., 2017). Some minority families have completed evidence-based parenting programs with effective outcomes (Mersky et al., 2017; Myers et al., 2019). However, most of the research on the effectiveness of evidence-based programs with diverse or minority participants is scarce, as there are concerns that the implementation challenges would corrupt the efficacy of evidence-based programs when minority parents are the participants (Mersky et al., 2017; Myers et al., 2019). For many families, having child welfare agencies involved in their lives may cause stigmatism (Garcia et al., 2018; Mersky et al., 2017). Often the family's past experiences with the child welfare system have left them feeling that they are a highly marginalized group of individuals who have experienced bias, trauma, mistrust, stigma, and racial discrimination at the hands of the child welfare system (Garcia et al., 2018). Garcia et al. (2018) advised that relationship building between human service

workers and the family is the central point of the evidence-based intervention. In evidence-based services, when all parties are eager to engage in the intervention, positive interactions increase trust, increasing cultural relevance between the families and human service workers.

The federal legislature has recently passed laws to keep children safely in their homes using evidence-based programs. The Federal Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 requires prevention and kinship programs to use evidence-based services, programs, and tools that meet requirements (GovTrack us, 2020; Testa & Kelly, 2020). The federal law Family First Prevention Services Act aims to keep children safely with their families when that family comes to the attention of the child welfare system. If the children need a foster care placement, that placement is in the most family-like setting, focusing on that child's individual needs (Lindell et al., 2020; Yampolskaya et al., 2020). The Family First Prevention Services Act focuses on critical elements of mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services and skill-based, in-home parenting programs (Lindell et al., 2020; Yampolskaya et al., 2020). The programs will be year-long-based programs for the families, specifically for those whose children are at imminent risk of entering foster care (Lindell et al., 2020; Yampolskaya et al., 2020). Human service workers use evidence-based services to promote that children and families will receive services that have effectively demonstrated success in assisting families.

SafeCare

SafeCare is a home-based, behavioral parenting, evidence-based program designed to address child neglect and physical abuse. SafeCare addresses the three skill shortfalls within a family that are direct precursors to child neglect and physical abuse, including positive parenting skills, home safety, and child healthcare skills (Self-Brown et al., 2018; Weeger et al., 2018). SafeCare can reduce child welfare recidivism (Gallitto et al., 2018), improve parenting skills (Self-Brown et al., 2018), decrease parental depression (Gallitto et al., 2018), increase program completion (Temcheff et al., 2018), and improve service satisfaction (Oppenheim-Weller & Zeira, 2018). SafeCare is an in-home evidence-based program that does weekly visits at the clients' homes, providing services and interventions geared toward keeping children safe in their homes by offering positive parenting skills, home safety skills, and child health skills.

Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (Secondary) Programs

Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (Secondary) Programs are evidence-based services that target individuals or families at high risk for maltreatment intending to prevent abuse or neglect. These programs offer activities targeted to families with one or more risk factors, including families with substance abuse or domestic violence issues, teenage parents, parents of special needs children, single parents, and low-income families (Temcheff et al., 2018; Weeger et al., 2018). The evidence-based services for preventing child abuse and neglect (secondary) programs will include assessment, case planning, case management, education, skill building, or service delivery to address risk factors for maltreatment (Temcheff et al., 2018; Weeger et al., 2018). Human services

workers' use of evidence-based services should specifically target the prevention of abuse or neglect in high-risk families.

Reunification Programs

Reunification programs are evidence-based programs designed to support the reunification of children and birth families after child welfare involvement. Almost half a million children are in foster care or out-of-home placements in the United States (Davidson et al., 2019). For 50% of these children, the case goal is reunification with their biological parents as quickly and safely as possible (Davidson et al., 2019). To assist with reunification process, child welfare provides evidence-based services to the child and the child's parents. These evidence-based services are time-limited and intended to support the reunification process (Akin et al., 2018; Myers et al., 2019). They address the causes of the child's removal and placement into foster care. Additionally, evidence-based reunification programs offer services focusing on the reason for removal and may need to be put into place during the reunification process (Olcoń, 2019). The standard evidence-based services associated with reunification include visitation between parent and child, visitation between siblings (if separated), case management services from the human services worker, parent training, anger management, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment for the child and parent(s), and domestic violence services.

Positive Parenting Program (Triple P)

Positive Parenting Programs (Triple P) are evidence-based services. These programs provide parents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to prevent and treat children's social, emotional, and behavioral problems (Casillas et al., 2016; Garcia et al.,

2018). Triple P programs have five levels of increasing intensity and narrowing population reach for parents of children from birth to age 20 (Garcia et al., 2018). Triple P is delivered in various modalities, ranging from broad media campaigns at the lowest level of intensity to specific behavioral family interventions at the highest level (Garcia et al., 2018; Pickering & Sanders, 2016). Triple P has been established as an efficacious and effective parenting intervention, evidenced by sustained positive changes in child behavior and parent skills, satisfaction, and efficacy (Pickering & Sanders, 2016). The primary themes of most evidence-based services are geared toward keeping children safely in their homes (Haskett et al., 2018; Pickering & Sanders, 2016). In those cases where children are removed from their parents, the goal of evidence-based services is the safe reunification of the children with their parents

Benefits of Evidence-Based Practices

Human service workers have multiple benefits from employing evidence-based services in their practice.

- Evidence-based practices enhance the human services workers' expertise by combining their best clinical experiences while staying consistent with the family needs (Landers et al., 2018).
- Evidence-based service components can be modified to meet the family's unique needs (Myers et al., 2019).
- Evidence-based services improve family functioning and child wellbeing (Landers et al., 2018).

- Evidence-based services reduce repeat maltreatment and child abuse, lowering recidivism (Haskett et al., 2018).
- Evidence-based services prevent children's placement in foster care (Lewis et al., 2020).
- Evidence-based services are ethically sound and have been tested to be safe and effective for specific populations (Lohr et al., 2019).
- Evidence-based services increase the communication and collaboration between human services workers and clients (Garcia et al., 2019).
- Evidence-based services improve families' quality and variety of services (Lewis et al., 2020).

The benefits of evidence-based services used by human services workers begin with a skilled assessment of the family so that the interventions they select appropriately match the identified problems. The skilled expertise of the human services worker, matched with the appropriate services and interventions, allows the services to meet a family's unique needs (Myers et al., 2019). Evidence-based services should be modified and personalized for families based on their culture, interests, and situations (Myers et al., 2019). Effective evidence-based services increase the communication and collaboration between the human services worker and their families, improving family functioning, fostering the children's safety, and allowing children to remain in their homes or reunified with their parents much sooner (Lewis et al., 2020). Evidence-based services may reduce recidivism of new child abuse allegations against families.

Challenges of Evidence-Based Practices

There are challenges that need to be considered when human services workers or their organizations decide to employ the use of evidence-based services into their practice.

- Increased turnover of human service workers at provider agencies is due to the intensive work requirements of providing evidence-based services (Lohr et al., 2019).
- The original and ongoing training costs for evidence-based services (Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2019).
- Human services workers appropriately refer clients to the correct and best evidence-based providers (Garcia et al., 2019).
- Evidence-based services aligned adequately with the policy and practice of the child welfare organization. A key challenge is determining the degree to which the fidelity evidence-based model by each provider agency aligns with the child welfare outcomes they achieve (Myers et al., 2019).
- There are concerns that evidence-based services are not geared toward minority populations (Richard & Lee, 2019).

The challenges of evidence-based services used by human services workers begin with the increased staff turnover and, in particular: human services workers (Lohr et al., 2019). The training in getting human services workers competent and the additional intensive workload involved in offering evidence-based services is time-consuming (Julien-Chinn & Lietz, 2019). There are concerns that evidence-based services are meant

to be used by the general population and are not adequate for minority populations (Akin et al., 2016; Richard & Lee, 2019). Human services ought to be familiar with evidence-based providers to effectively refer their clients to the correct and best evidence-based provider to meet the needs of individual families.

Cultural Sensitivity

All human services workers must become culturally competent to meet the needs of their clients as their clients are becoming more diverse. Cultural sensitivity is the process by which human service workers interact respectfully and effectively with people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a way that will recognize, affirm and value the individual or family (Lovato-Hermann et al., 2017). Within cultural sensitivity, human services case workers should have a higher consciousness and knowledge base of the uniqueness of their clients' cultures and be sensitive to clients' cultures and differences among people and various groups (National Association of Social Workers, n.d.). Cultural sensitivity allows human service case workers to feel more comfortable, providing more effective interactions and relationships with their clients.

Due to the change in U.S. demographics, human service professionals in all sectors of the child welfare field ought to become culturally competent. By the year 2055, over 51% of the U.S. population will be composed of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans (Colvin et al., 2020). This change in the racial profile of the United States will require human services case workers to change their social work practice to become more diverse in their ability to understand and work effectively with

families of various cultures, races, and ethnic backgrounds (Lovato-Hermann et al., 2017). According to Colvin (2020), to work effectively with various ethnic groups and culturally diverse community members, human service workers should understand the importance of ethnicity and how it influences thoughts, behaviors, and responses to services. Bauer and Bai (2018) stated that by valuing the diversity of the clients, human services case workers could better meet the needs of their clients by delivering more appropriate and compassionate service. Cultural sensitivity, awareness, and knowledge are requirements for such understanding and are critical to a human services case worker's successful career.

A lack of culturally appropriate services may perpetuate the issues faced by minority families, especially African American families, from the child welfare system. Many African American families may face socioeconomic and sociocultural issues, including exposure to poverty, crime, racism, oppression, violence, substandard housing, dangerous neighborhood conditions, a lack of employment, substandard employment opportunities, and a lack of quality health, which are all linked to poor health and mental health outcomes (Bauer & Bai 2018; Lovato-Hermann et al., 2017). When human services case workers do not engage the client with culturally appropriate services, the client may not trust the human services worker. The client may be apprehensive about the human services case workers' motives and may not self-disclose pertinent information on the family (Colvin et al., 2020). In addition, the client may incorporate passive or avoidant behaviors (Colvin et al., 2020). Cheng and Lo (2018) stated that due to a lack of cultural awareness and racial bias by the human services case workers, most African

American families involved in the child welfare system do not receive appropriate services. When families involved with human services case workers do not receive culturally appropriate services, the children may remain in foster care placements longer and are not reunified with their parents in a timely manner.

The lack of culturally appropriate services is not only limited to African American families and ethnic minorities. The lack of culturally appropriate services also influences various cultures, religions, sexual orientations, and ethnic backgrounds (Mosher et al., 2017). For human services case workers to be culturally sensitive, they should be culturally competent in all phases of their practice and use an intersectionality approach to all their clients (Colvin et al., 2020; Danso, 2018; Mosher et al., 2017). An intersectionality approach to practice for human services case workers includes all forms of discrimination, oppression, and domination through the diverse elements of race and ethnicity, religious ideologies, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, social class, and physical and mental abilities (Colvin et al., 2020; Mosher et al., 2017). For human services case workers to use an intersectionality approach with their clients, they should practice cultural humility.

Children Who Identify as LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ children who are involved in the child welfare system may face different struggles and issues the straight children who are involved in the child welfare system. Many children who identify as LGBTQ+ have not only been ostracized by family and school but are likely to experience negative interactions with human services case workers and other child welfare professionals (Scannapieco et al., 2018). Furthermore,

when LGBTQ+ children are removed from their parents and enter the foster care system. They are twice as likely to be treated poorly by their foster parents, placed in a group home, and three times more likely to be hospitalized for emotional and mental health reasons (Dettlaff et al., 2018). Human services case workers should understand that some LGBTQ+ children experience a lack of acceptance from their peers, caregivers, and foster parents. They often run away from their placements due to a lack of acceptance (McCormick et al., 2017). While in foster care, LGBTQ+ children are more likely to age out of the foster care system than their heterosexual counterparts (McCormick et al., 2017).

Furthermore, of the LGBTQ+ children who have aged out of foster care, nearly 18% of LGBTQ+ children experienced homelessness; more than 50% were unemployed, and over 30% of LGBTQ+ children reported being arrested since leaving care (McCormick et al., 2017). The rejection and ostracism felt by LGBTQ+ children are associated with experiences of their victimization at home, school, with friends, foster parents, and human services workers, which leads to social isolation, feeling defeated, and developing mental health issues and suicidal ideations (Kaasboll & Paulsen, 2019; McCormick et al., 2017; Scannapieco et al., 2018). LGBTQ+ children are overrepresented in the child welfare system, with some LGBTQ+ children experiencing discrimination, marginalization, and an overall feeling of a lack of acceptance (McCormick et al., 2017). The child welfare system may benefit from the efforts of human services case workers to be culturally sensitive to the needs of LGBTQ+ children

and focus their efforts on creating safety, stability, support, and affirmation for LGBTQ+ children.

Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy is an ongoing crisis in the United States. In 2017, a total of 194,377 babies were born to women aged 15–19 in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2019). In the United States, the teen pregnancy rate is substantially higher than in other Western industrialized nations (Combs et al., 2019). Teen pregnancy and childbearing bring substantial social and economic costs through immediate and long-term impacts on teen parents and their children (CDC, 2019). The substantial socioeconomic cost of teen pregnancy includes lower education and lower income levels of a teen's family, which may contribute to high teen birth rates (CDC, 2019).

Furthermore, teens in child welfare systems are at a higher risk of teen pregnancy and birth than other groups; additionally, teens in foster care are twice as likely to become pregnant than teens not in foster care (Combs et al., 2019). The children of teenage mothers are more likely to have lower school achievement and drop out of high school, have more health problems, be incarcerated at some time during adolescence, give birth as a teenager, and face unemployment as a young adult (Harmon-Darrow et al., 2020). Teen mothers face psychological factors, such as depression and stress, which impacts child development (Harmon-Darrow et al., 2020). Teenage pregnancy is a cultural and social issue that may result from a teen girl's interaction with her environmental influences and her relationship and communication with her family

(Combs et al., 2019). Environment, poor communication, education, and social issues may contribute to teenage pregnancy.

Human services case workers must have an understanding and compassion for teenage girls who become pregnant. Human services case workers should understand that culture is essential in exploring teenage pregnancy (Harmon-Darrow et al., 2020). Why is it prevented within different cultures, and why teenage mothers and women without children are not educated on pregnancy prevention (Combs et al., 2019; Potter & Font, 2019)? Human services case workers should be culturally aware of their perceptions of social justice when working with teen mothers because how the human services worker perceives societal issues may affect the interventions and services they will offer the teen mother (Combs et al., 2019; Potter & Font, 2019). The cultural competence and cultural awareness of the human services case worker will have a direct bearing on the relationship they have with the teen mother so that they relate to the issue, establish trust, build rapport, and comprehend the issue based on the teen mother's reality.

Noncustodial Fathers

Noncustodial fathers have rights to visitation and the right to share essential decisions in their child's upbringing. In 2018, there were 21,066,758 single-parent households in the United States, with 15,061,379 being single-mother households and 6,005,379 being single-father households (United States Census Bureau, 2018). In households with no marriage or cohabitation between biological parents, the parents are labeled single parents (Arroyo et al., 2019). These figures do not show the actual number of noncustodial fathers.

Noncustodial fathers have rights and privileges over their children, even if they do not pay any child support. For some noncustodial fathers who want to be involved in their child's lives, there may be barriers that they need to overcome. Noncustodial fathers face challenges in maintaining or contacting their children (Brewsaugh et al., 2018; Self-Brown et al., 2018; Vogt Yuan, 2016). Noncustodial fathers who have a conflict with the biological mother or financial strain, such as being unemployed, are often not allowed access to their children (Self-Brown et al., 2018). The homelessness of noncustodial fathers is a barrier to any relationship with their children due to their lack of stable housing (Brewsaugh et al., 2018). Children generally live with their mothers if the noncustodial father is homeless (Arroyo et al., 2019). A fathers' role is vital in their children's development (Kelly, 2018), and early father involvement has positive outcomes on the child's cognitive development (Brewsaugh et al., 2018). Children who have higher cognition, better interactions, and socializing skills have better involvement with their fathers, both physically and emotionally (Kelly, 2018). The child's development is enhanced when both parents work together, allowing the noncustodial fathers to have substantial involvement and interactions in the child's life.

Human services case workers could offer noncustodial fathers an opportunity to be involved in any interventions or services when children become involved with ongoing services. When noncustodial fathers, voluntarily or through court orders, participate in the case plan and fatherhood or parenting services and interventions, human services case workers should be culturally sensitive and culturally aware of their bias (Arroyo et al., 2019). Human services case workers need to be culturally sensitive about

their relationship with their fathers and how the relationship could affect the interventions for noncustodial fathers (Arditti et al., 2019; Arroyo et al., 2019; Balmer et al., 2018).

Human services case workers should be culturally competent and aware of the issues that could impact their relationship with the noncustodial father, including power relations, communication differences, and mutual fear (Arroyo et al., 2019; Balmer et al., 2018).

Human services workers should stay culturally aware of their bias when working with noncustodial fathers.

Cultural Competence With African American Families

The societal problems of disparity and disproportionality have been an issue within the child welfare system. African American children make up 23% of the foster care population while constituting less than 14% of the children in the United States (Kids Count Data Center, 2019). Once African American children are removed from their parental homes, they will remain in foster care longer, are moved more often, receive fewer services (including mental health counseling), and are less likely to be returned home or adopted than other children (Kokaliari et al., 2019). Using culturally competent services for African American families, disparity and disproportionality may be reduced. There are differences between people due to race, ethnicity, and culture, as well as from family background and individual experience (Be'eri et al., 2019). These differences may affect the beliefs and behaviors that human services case workers and African American clients may have toward each other. Culturally competent services facilitate encounters between human services case workers and African American clients with more favorable

outcomes, enhance the potential for a more rewarding interpersonal experience and increase the satisfaction of the individual receiving services.

Factors in the Delivery of Culturally Competent Child Welfare Services

There are multiple issues that should be understood to properly deliver culturally competent services to African Americans in the child welfare system.

- Beliefs, values, traditions, and practices of a culture (Aquilani et al., 2017).
- Culturally defined needs of individuals, families, and communities (Benuto et al, 2018).
- Culturally based belief systems of the rearing of children and those related to health and healing, attitudes toward seeking help from child welfare providers (Matthews et al., 2018).

When human services case workers offer adequate services to their clients, they need to know about family functioning. Additionally, when human services case workers assess the family functioning of African American families, they should be culturally competent (Manyam et al., 2020). Human services case workers who are culturally competent could engage a culturally diverse clients' reality in a genuine, authentic, accepting, and non-offensive manner, as well as give equal value to their client's worldview (Alvarez-Hernandez & Choi, 2017). African American clients who feel their human services worker is culturally competent and care for them and their family as equals would more likely work with the human services case worker to keep the family intact and their children safe in the home.

Summary

Throughout the reviewed literature, varied factors were found to support the basis for my study. I provided a background of how culturally appropriate, evidence-based services can improve human services workers' performance and relationships when working with their clients. I reviewed the various tenets of Bowen's family systems theory, focusing on three of Bowen's basic tenets of the nuclear family emotional system, differentiation of self, and triangles (Bowen, 1966). I examined various interventions and services to enhance my understanding of evidence-based services, including SafeCare, Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (Secondary) Programs, Reunification Programs, and Triple P. I explored the benefits of evidence-based practices and the challenges of evidence-based practices. I examined various interventions and services to enhance my understanding of cultural sensitivity, including children who identify as LGBTQ+, teenage pregnancy, and noncustodial fathers. Lastly, I examined cultural competence with African American families.

In Chapter 3, I explain the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and the methodology for this study. Furthermore, I explore the data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and the ethical procedures that were used to complete this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this basic qualitative study, I aimed to explore human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States to improve services to families. This chapter includes a detailed discussion of the methodological plan for this basic qualitative study. This chapter includes the following sections: (a) research design and rationale, (b) role of the researcher, (c) methodology, and (d) issues of trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key methodological issues, procedures, and concepts to conduct the study.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative methodology is used to understand how people experience the world. With qualitative methodology, researchers can comprehend complex social issues and problems by understanding and discovering the meanings of the human experience (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Qualitative methodology is an evolving, inductive, and naturalistic approach to studying phenomena, social situations, and people in their settings to attach meaning to their worldly experiences (Azungah, 2018). Qualitative methodology is used to understand and describe the phenomenon studied by analyzing and communicating peoples' experiences in their words through interviewing and observing the participants (Larkin et al., 2019). Qualitative methodology is more effective in understanding human experiences than quantitative or mixed methods because qualitative methodology is appropriate and occurs in a specific place and time (Dodgson, 2019). According to Fisher and Bloomfield (2019), qualitative researchers

value the participants' subjectiveness and seek to investigate and understand the participants' experience of the phenomenon. I answered my research question by understanding the worldview, experiences, and perceptions of the participants who provide culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients.

The research design for this study was a basic qualitative design. In a basic qualitative design, the researcher can access and analyze the participants' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about their personal experiences in the real world (Nathoo et al., 2021; Percy et al., 2015). An advantage of using the basic qualitative design is that it is not guided by an overt or determined set of philosophical assumptions and is one of the more established qualitative designs (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Jahja et al., 2021). Furthermore, basic qualitative studies allow the researcher to draw on the strengths of established qualitative methodologies while providing the flexibility that makes basic approaches desirable (Kahlke, 2018). Through this basic qualitative study, I obtained more detail from the study's participants because they could share their perceptions and beliefs of their real-world experiences of being human services case workers. This basic qualitative study allowed me to complete an in-depth exploration of the participants' beliefs and reflections to collect the data needed to answer my research question (see Kahlke, 2018). Additionally, this basic qualitative study allowed me to understand the participants' perspective and identify the recurring patterns and themes from the telephonic interviews (see Jahja et al., 2021). I chose the basic qualitative design because I wanted to provide human services case workers with the opportunity to convey their experiences of providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to African

American families and children in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. child welfare system to improve services to families. Furthermore, this approach allowed me to collect deep, rich, in-depth information regarding how human services case workers perceive their abilities to provide culturally sensitive, evidence-based services.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to collect and analyze data, discuss findings, and provide a response to the research question. The researcher is the instrument for analysis across all phases of a qualitative research project (Nowell et al., 2017). As a qualitative researcher for this study, I conducted semistructured in-depth telephonic interviews during the data collection process. My role as the researcher included interviewing the participants to collect, analyze, and interpret the study's data. Participants' experiences were analyzed to determine the shared themes among the human services case workers.

My previous experience may have led to potential bias while collecting and analyzing the data. Because I had been in the child welfare field for almost 20 years, mainly as a child protection supervisor, I had preconceived ideas about the lack of evidence-based, culturally appropriate services when working with some clients. According to Meyer and Willis (2019), biases in qualitative research are not eliminated; however, the researcher's goal is to reduce biases through awareness, purpose, and practice. I reduced my bias by being aware of my assumptions and by using reflexive journaling.

I mitigated my biases by bracketing my preconceived ideas about the topic in my research journal. Bracketing is a technique used by researchers to omit the potentially

detrimental effects of unrecognized preconceptions related to the study (Emiliussen et al., 2021). By using bracketing, the researcher can reach more profound levels of reflection across all stages of qualitative research, including selecting a topic and population, designing the interview, collecting and interpreting data, and reporting findings (Emiliussen et al., 2021; Tufford & Newman, 2012). I used bracketing during the data collection process to limit the effects of my preconceived notions and perspectives. I identified my assumptions and opinions and how they may have influenced the data (see Emiliussen et al., 2021). Bracketing and using reflective journaling helped me set aside opinions that may have hindered data collection and analysis.

I had no personal or professional relationship with any of the participants. I was no longer employed with the study site state in the Upper Midwest section of the United States. I did not supervise any of the participants from my time employed with this state in the Upper Midwest section of the United States. There was no conflict of interest or financial incentive offered to the participants.

As the researcher for this study, I was concerned that the participants might not have answered my questions honestly due to the topic's sensitive nature. To mitigate this concern, I built rapport with the participants. To build rapport and a relationship, qualitative researchers need to identify the participants' expectations, goals, benefits, risks, and assumptions related to the study (Jenner & Myers, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Because I had worked in the child welfare system for over 20 years, I knew the roles and responsibilities of human services case workers. This commonality helped me reduce tension and improve rapport with the participants. It was crucial to communicate

my role as a researcher in a way that was understood and acceptable to the participants (see Jenner & Myers, 2018). When the communication between the researcher and the participants is understood and accepted, the participants are more likely to respond with honest answers that are rich and detailed and honestly reflect their personal experiences and perceptions.

Methodology

Participation Selection

In this study, I obtained responses from a population of human services case workers working in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. This basic qualitative study sample included 12 participants until I reached data saturation. I sought to interview nonlicensed human services case workers who had developed case plans and offered services to African American families involved in the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. In qualitative research, the sample size depends on what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, the usefulness of the sample size, credibility, and what research can be done with the available time and resources (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The number of 12 participants was chosen as the proposed sample size for this study because the sample sizes for generic qualitative studies fluctuate and sometimes are small (see Percy et al., 2015; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Saturation is a leading tenet to determining sample size in qualitative research and is reached when there is no new information from the participants (Hennink et al., 2017; Percy et al., 2015). Having too few participants may negatively impact the quality of this study.

I purposively selected the participants for this study based on their availability to participate in the study and their willingness to share their experiences of working with African American clients who are involved in the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. Purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling method and is a technique with which the researcher relies on their judgment when choosing members of a population to participate in the study (Ames et al., 2019). Purposive sampling is practical when a smaller sample size can serve as a primary data source due to the nature of the research design and the objectives of the study (Serra et al., 2018). I selected participants who could provide information and insight on the topic I researched due to their experience with the phenomenon being investigated. The sample population for this basic qualitative study was 12 nonlicensed human services case workers who had developed case plans and offered services to African American families involved in the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. I recruited participants who had met the criteria because this group had knowledge and experience with the phenomenon. The participants I chose were a representative sample who fit the study's needs and met the study's characteristics.

I used snowball sampling as a secondary sampling strategy to obtain participants when I could not obtain enough participants through purposeful sampling. Snowball sampling is a method commonly used when investigating hard-to-reach groups, and it consists of identifying primary participants and relying on them for referrals for other prospective participants who meet the selection criteria. Snowball sampling can also provide data and information on the topic (Sykes et al., 2018). After receiving

information about other potential participants from the current participants, I contacted the potential participants by email, describing the nature of the study and including the benefits to the human services case workers and their clients. I also provided potential participants with an invitation to participate in the study. I followed up on the invitation with a phone call to the prospective participants.

An adequate sample size is connected to the concept of data saturation. Qualitative research has no published guidelines for establishing the exact sample size to reach saturation (Constantinou et al., 2017; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Data saturation is accomplished when bringing in new participants would be redundant and no new data are being received (Constantinou et al., 2017; Hennink et al., 2017; Vasileiou et al., 2018). I began this study with 10 participants and then interviewed 2 additional participants until data saturation was reached. I checked that no new themes or information was being obtained through data collection. I knew when data saturation was reached by interviewing participants until I did not obtain any new information or ideas from the participants. Once it was determined that data saturation was reached, I did one more interview to verify that data saturation had been attained.

Procedures

I recruited human services case workers participants by using social media workgroups on various social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. The human services case workers for this study were recruited via posted recruitment flyers on Facebook, LinkedIn, and human services case workers social work groups on various social media platforms. I joined several private human services case

workers social media work groups on Facebook and posted flyers during the recruitment period on social media. I sent potential participants an email describing the nature of the study, including the benefits to the human services case workers' profession and to their clients. I followed up the email with a phone call to the prospective participants. The population for this study was nonlicensed human services case workers who had developed case plans and offered services to African American families involved in the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. I conducted in-depth telephonic interviews. The telephonic interviews were audio recorded, and I took written notes on the participants' answers to the questions. I informed the participants that the initial interviews would take 45 to 60 minutes.

Instrumentation

My role as the researcher was as an instrument. I used an interview protocol to explore the participants' perceptions of offering culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to their clients (see Appendix A). The interview protocol included a three-phase process of ensuring that the interview questions would align with research questions, creating open-ended and inquiry-based questions, and receiving and implementing the feedback from the expert panel reviewers on the interview protocols (see Assarroudi et al., 2018; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). One of the goals of qualitative research is to discover as much as possible about the participants and their experiences on the research topic by asking the participants open-ended questions on the topic (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The interviews were conducted via semistructured interviews by telephone. The participants were offered their choice of telephonic or

Zoom interviews. All of the participants chose telephonic interviews. Semistructured interviews combine the flexibility of the unstructured, open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of a structured interview (Roulston, 2018). I used a demographic sheet for each participant in which I gathered background information on each participant while building rapport and the answers to the interview questions. The telephonic interviews were digitally audio-recorded with the participants' consent, and complete transcriptions (verbatim) were created after the interviews were conducted.

Expert Panel Review

I conducted the expert panel review to promote the validity of the interview protocol. The expert panel review consists of specialists determined to be experts based on their professional attributes such as occupation, experience, and education (see Burden et al., 2020). The expert panel review occurred prior to beginning the data collection. By conducting the expert panel review, I developed interview questions after the panelists reviewed the original interview protocol and suggested revisions and improvements to the questions.

The expert panel review consisted of three members who promoted the content and method of the interview questions. Because my research focused on the perceptions of human services case workers, I believed it was best to seek the expertise of specialized individuals who had working knowledge of the population under study. Two of the expert panel review members were human services supervisors. Both human services supervisors were experienced in working with and supervising human services case workers in this state in the Upper Midwest section of the United States. Both supervisors

had expertise in discussing cases and interactions between human services case workers and their clients.

Furthermore, both supervisors had expertise in designing interview questions for new employee applicants and evaluating the applicant's responses. The third expert panel review member had her doctorate and is a professor in the Communications Studies Department at a major university in the Eastern United States. Her research interests are in the intersection of family, culture, health humanities, and health communication. She regularly publishes on topics such as children's health, mental health, end-of-life communication, family disability, and qualitative research methods.

I used the knowledge of the expert panel review to evaluate the extent in which the interview questions would solicit rich and full responses from the participants. The expert panel members provided written feedback on the clarity of the vocabulary and language incorporated in the interview questions in the interview protocol. Statements and questions were modified and revised so that the participants' responses would not predispose them to answer in ways that are politically correct or do not shed light on only positive perceptions. Furthermore, the expert panel review assisted me in ensuring the construction and content of the interview questions aligned with the research design and study's intention.

Data Analysis Plan

The data for this basic qualitative study were systematically organized and analyzed. I used an automated transcription service to transcribe the interview data. I used both a verbatim transcription and a summary transcription for all the interviews. I

verified the accuracy of the entire transcripts by listening to the recording and reading through the transcripts multiple times. I coded the interview data, notes, and my reflective journal data using a line-by-line method as suggested by Saldana (2016). Saldana divided coding methods into two main stages: the first and second cycle. First cycle coding is the initial exploration of the participants' concepts, phrases, or statements repeatedly (Saldana, 2016). First cycle codes are divided under seven different subcategories: grammatical methods, elemental methods, effective methods, literary and language methods, exploratory methods, procedural methods, and themeing the data (Saldana, 2016). The subcategories are then divided into multiple characteristics. It is up to the researcher to decide which of these seven subcategories or combinations of subcategories and their characteristics are appropriate to use in their study. According to Saldana, the researchers' decision on which subcategories and characteristics are to be used depends on several factors, including the researchers' experience level, research question, type of interviews, data collecting procedures, and the nature and goals of the study. In this study, I used the elemental methods subcategory with the following characterizations: in vivo coding, values coding, and process coding. In vivo coding uses actual phrases from the participant, and it is helpful for novice qualitative researchers learning how to code data and focus on and respect the participant's perceptions (Saldana, 2016). Values coding explores the participants' cultural values and belief practices, identity, and the participants' intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences and actions (Saldana, 2016). Process coding effectively examines changes that occur when persons act or interact to reach a goal or solve a problem. Processes are rooted in psychological perceptions such

as prejudice, identity, and trust (Saldana, 2016). Additionally, process coding happens concurrently with second stage coding methods of focused coding and axial coding.

I used second cycle coding to create a categorical, thematic, conceptual, and theoretical organization from the collection of first cycle codes. Second cycle coding allowed me to manage a large amount of data in a manner that enabled a focus on the rational map of the phenomenon I studied (see Saldana, 2016). Pattern codes often summarize data in four interrelated ways: categories and themes, causes and explanations, relationships among people, and theoretical constructs (Saldana, 2016). These pattern codes led me to a more in-depth analysis of the interview results. Qualitative researchers need to have a systematic approach to interpreting the transcripts to represent the subjective thoughts and feelings of the participants, as well as immerse themselves in the transcripts to understand the determining codes, categories, themes, and subthemes in the data (Saldana, 2016). I categorized data to identify themes and discrepant data, which informed the critical findings of this study (see Saldana, 2016). The findings were collected from the data analyzed concerning the research questions and interpreted regarding the conceptual framework and literature review. The collected data were analyzed to develop meaning. I did not use systematic software to analyze data due to the number of participants in the study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the accuracy of a research study, data, and findings. Confidence in the truth of a qualitative study is based on the study's trustworthiness (Spiers et al., 2018). To promote trustworthiness for this study, I used

appropriate strategies to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to support the strength of this generic qualitative study.

Credibility

I promoted that my findings are credible. The creditability of a qualitative study is based on the researcher's truthful interpretation and representation of the data received from the participants in the study (Eldh et al., 2020). To promote credibility, I triangulated the data using various sources of my data collection; including telephonic interviews and reflective journaling, to check the accuracy and credibility of the data (see Eldh et al., 2020). Triangulation ensures credibility by using multiple approaches, such as audio and visual observations, analyzing written data, and having the participants validate their information for accuracy.

Transferability

The transferability of this study was limited. According to Roman et al. (2020), while credibility parallels internal validity, transferability parallels the study's external validity. Transferability is met in a qualitative study when the same set of conditions applies to a different population of participants with the same background as the original study participants (Roman et al., 2020). To promote the transferability of this study, I used purposive sampling, which consisted of human services case workers who developed case plans and provided services to their African American clients in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. I accomplished this by succinctly describing the population being explored, participant selection, and geographic boundaries of the study (see Cypress, 2017). Transferability may be achieved when the study findings can

be helpful to other groups (Cope, 2014). To provide transferability and allow the findings to be used in other fields and studies, I provided a clear description of the sampling techniques, inclusion criteria, and participants' main characteristics. My study may be transferable because other human services case workers and child welfare agencies may benefit from the findings.

Dependability

Dependability may be met in this study by following the methodology of the generic study research design and the data collection details. Dependability parallels the reliability of the study and focuses on the processes of the study to demonstrate that the process is logical and documented (Eldh et al., 2020). I used memoing to develop an audit trail throughout the study (see Kozleski, 2017). The audit trail is essential in qualitative studies to establish dependability (Kozleski, 2017). In order to develop a detailed audit trail, I maintained a log of all research activities, memos, research journals, and data collection and analysis procedures throughout this study (Kozleski, 2017). By using an audit trail, I developed more in-depth research notes in the form of journals and memos, as well as explained my research decisions, activities, reflective attitude, and transparency in my study.

Confirmability

Confirmability was met in this study as my role as the researcher was documented. The confirmability of the data is necessary for the researcher to minimize their bias, maximize accuracy of the researcher, and promote that the researcher be impartial throughout the study (Kozleski, 2017). Confirmability indicates the extent to

which the study results are objective and free of researcher bias (Eldh et al., 2020). To promote confirmability, I kept a reflective journal to keep my thoughts separate from those of the participants, as well as detailed notes to capture any of my personal views or biases during the interview process see (see Spiers et al., 2018). I made sure that the findings of my study were based on the information that was collected during the interviews.

Ethical Procedures

The participants in this study have rights and should be treated fairly. The participants of my proposed study were protected under the process held by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University. The purpose of an IRB is to protect human subjects from illegal and unethical treatment during the study and establish ethical standards for conducting research with human subjects (Tauri, 2017). I submitted a completed IRB form to comply with the ethical procedures. The IRB approved my application for this study. My IRB approval # is 04-12-22-0664628. I abided by the various ethical considerations to safeguard participants' dignity, rights, and wellbeing throughout this study. Ethical procedures were used to secure participants' consent and safeguard participants' rights, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy (Tauri, 2017). The potential participants were given enough information to make an informed decision to participate in the study. Informed consent consists of rights, voluntary participation, the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and privacy (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). All participants submitted the consent form to me before the telephonic interviews. Once I received the informed consent form back from

the participants, I signed and emailed a copy to the participants. All of the participants were informed that they were allowed to withdraw early from the study before they agreed to participate in the study and that the consent form addressing early withdrawal explained that the participant would not be treated differently for choosing to withdraw at any point (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I was solely responsible for collecting all data during the research.

The data attained during the research were kept private and confidential. The participants' responses were kept confidential. The telephonic interviews were conducted in private. The audio recordings, transcripts, and notes were secured in a locked filing cabinet in a private location in my home. I used codes on the documents to gather data from participants rather than participants' names to identify information. I kept a document that will link the codes to participants' identifying information locked in a separate secured location in my home. The computer used to document the data analysis is locked and secured with a password. The data will also remain confidential, and after the entire research process was completed; the data will be kept for a minimum period of 5 years, depending on the current standard of Walden University Research Protocol.

Summary

Chapter 3 addressed the methodology used in this study. A description of the research design and rationale was presented in this chapter. A description of researcher's role, methodology, population, instrumentation, procedures, expert panel review, data collection, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability, and ethical procedures were included. This study aimed to

explore human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients. A basic generic qualitative approach was used to conduct this study. I conducted the research and was responsible for obtaining all data for the study.

Chapter 4 provides the results of the study. It includes the setting, demographics, data collection and data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States to improve services offered to families. I aimed to provide information on the benefits of using culturally sensitive, evidence-based services and referrals. African American families may be better served, and child safety and well-being could be improved in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. As a result of this study, human services case workers' use of culturally sensitive, evidence-based services may affect whether services offered to African American and racial minority families may be improved. This study was guided by one research question: What are nonlicensed human service case workers' perceptions of providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to African American families and children in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. child welfare system to improve services to families? The contents of this chapter include the settings for the study, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results of the study, and a summary of the chapter.

Setting

I began the data collection process after receiving IRB approval to conduct the study. This study took place during the unusual circumstances of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Initially, the study was to include face-to-face in-person interviews; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants were given the choice of participating via telephonic or Zoom interviews. All of the participants chose to complete the

interviews telephonically. The participant determined the date and time of the interview. The use of telephonic interviews did not negatively affect the quality of the data collected, and data collection had been improved by the rich and detailed nature of a telephone conversation.

Demographics

The participants in this basic qualitative study were nonlicensed human services case workers who had developed case plans and offered services to African American families involved in the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States. All of the participants were over 21 years old. The demographic information of gender, age, and race was not requested or necessary for this study based on the content of the research question. The chosen participants constituted a representative sample who fit the needs of the study.

Data Collection

I collected data from 12 participants for this basic qualitative study. I collected data through semistructured telephone interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were offered either Zoom or telephonic semistructured interviews due to COVID-19. All of the participants chose telephonic semistructured interviews. The semistructured interviews were conducted during a 7-week period. The interviews were scheduled for approximately 45 to 60 minutes for each participant; however, all of the interviews were completed between 41 and 57 minutes.

All of the participants' interviews were recorded after each participant gave their permission for me to record the interview. I recorded all of the interviews on my iPhone

using the TapeACall app. After the semistructured interviews were recorded, I used TapeACall to transcribe all of the audio-recorded interviews. Last, I reviewed each transcribed interview line by line to correct any minor mistakes made during the transcription, and I also compared the responses to my reflective journaling notes. I did not encounter any abnormal circumstances or variations during the data collection process from the plan presented in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

The data for this basic qualitative study were systematically organized and analyzed. I coded the interview data, notes, and reflective journal data using a line-by-line method, as suggested by Saldana (2016). I divided the coding methods into two main stages: first cycle and second cycle. The first cycle coding was the initial exploration of concepts, phrases, or statements that were repeatedly used by the participants (see Saldana, 2016). I used second cycle coding to create categories and themes from the collection of the first cycle codes. I began the detailed data analysis using the coding process by organizing the data into sentence segments and then into categories and labeling the categories with terms those participants used. I then used the coding process and categories to develop a description of the participants, which represented the themes' descriptions. I interpreted the meaning of the data by focusing on and making sense of the participants' perspectives of their experiences as human services case workers, paying attention to their exact language and the conclusions drawn by each of the 12 participants. The data analysis moved inductively from the coded units in the interviews to labeled categories and then into themes.

Several hundred first cycle codes were developed and repeated by the participants. I characterized my first cycle coding using in vivo, values, and process coding. By using in vivo coding, the researcher prioritizes and honors the participant's voice (Saldana, 2016). Value coding includes the cultural values and belief systems, identity, and intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of the participants' experiences (Saldana, 2016). Process coding is rooted in psychological perceptions such as prejudice, identity, and trust (Saldana, 2016). The nine most common and repeated codes in the current study were culture, being culturally competent, bias, having perspective, racism, trust, open-mindedness, education, and diversity.

I conducted process coding concurrently with second stage coding, which led to the development of categories and themes. The process coding was influential in developing the categories used for this study. I reviewed all of the codes, and then I grouped the codes into categories. The categorization process involved grouping the first cycle codes that were similar under the same more extensive codes known as categories. Using categories, I reduced the preliminary first cycle codes under a specific topic. The categories that emerged from the initial coding were cultural awareness and sensitivity, evidence-based services, training of human services case workers, diversity of clients, lack of trust, cultural bias of human services case workers, lack of diversity in the workforce, different perspectives and viewpoints, lack of culturally competency, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, and religious beliefs.

Analyzing and sorting the first cycle and second cycle codes into categories enabled me to detect overarching themes from the data. The categorization of codes

reflected the themes. The theme can result from coding, categorization, or analytic reflection (Saldana, 2016). I included the themes that emerged during data analysis from the telephonic interviews that represented the findings from the 12 participants' responses. The themes that emerged were importance of cultural competency, effective evidence-based services, human services case workers' biases, lack of diversity in human services case workers, cultural upbringing and environment, Families First Act and African American clients, cultural awareness and sensitivity training, lack of trust of the human services case workers, rural versus urban areas and population, and trust and rapport building.

No discrepant cases were factored into the data analysis; however, one participant's responses to the training question deviated from the norm. This outlier had only positive responses regarding the training offered by the state. I do not know why this participant responded differently than the other participants. This participant did not vary from the norm in responding to any of the other interview questions.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I ensured the credibility of this study by using triangulation, audio recording, transcription of the semistructured telephonic interviews, and reflective journaling to gain a truthful interpretation of the data received from the participants. I obtained Walden University IRB approval prior to collecting any data. I used direct quotes from the participants during the data collection process to develop themes and improve the

credibility of this study. All participants were allowed to review their responses for accuracy and truthfulness.

Transferability

I promoted transferability for this study by providing other researchers with evidence that this study's findings could apply to other perspectives, conditions, and populations. According to Cope (2014), transferability is accomplished when the study's findings can be applied to other research, groups, or settings. The transferability of the current study will allow the findings to be applied to other human services case workers' studies. The transferability of this study was further accomplished by the thick and rich descriptions that were part of the detailed accounts and the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

Dependability

I ensured dependability of this study by outlining the details of the data collection. I detailed the steps taken in this research process, including a description of the coding process, how the data were analyzed, and the steps taken to recruit participants so that the findings could be repeated with comparable participants in comparable conditions. The semistructured interview approach allowed the participants to take the lead in the interview data collection process when topics that were important to them were discussed, increasing dependability. Other researchers could replicate this study in comparable conditions and obtain the same results.

Confirmability

I promoted confirmability in this study through a reflective journal to keep my thoughts separate from those of the participants, and I took detailed notes to capture my personal views or biases during the interview process. According to Patton (2002), the study needs to be free of prejudice and bias for confirmability to be accomplished. Through the reflective journaling process, I reflected on my biases and values to ensure transparency and that the study was completed honestly and truthfully. After each semistructured telephonic interview, I reviewed the transcript and listened to the semistructured telephonic interview a second time to ensure that the process that was conducted for all interviews was consistent and free of my bias. I made sure that the findings of my study were based on the data provided by the participants that were collected during the semistructured telephonic interviews.

Results

In this basic qualitative study, I explored one research question to understand human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States to improve services offered to families: What are nonlicensed human services case workers' perceptions of providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to African American families and children in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. child welfare system to improve services to families? The participants were 12 human services case workers from an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States, all of whom were interviewed through individual semistructured telephonic interviews.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym for the interview audio recordings, the interview transcripts, and the results. The results were based on the semistructured telephonic interviews of the 12 participants. Based on the interview responses from the 12 human services case workers, the following 10 themes emerged: the importance of cultural competency, effective evidence-based services, human services case workers' biases, lack of diversity in human services case workers, cultural upbringing and environment, Families First Act and African American clients, cultural awareness and sensitivity training, lack of trust of the human services case workers, rural versus urban areas and population, and trust and rapport building.

Theme 1: Importance of Cultural Competency

Cultural competency was mentioned by all of the participants as an essential part of performing the work of human services case workers. Participant 1 stated "cultural competency means to me is being aware that other cultures might function different than that of your own." Participant 1 also stated

there is lots of different cultures out there that we need to be aware of and we need to be educating ourselves in as we as we come across with different cultures that we might not be familiar with our might not have a lot of information or education on.

Furthermore, Participant 1 stated

when we do kind of approach another culture, it can be a little bit of a shock and they're like, oh boy, how do we, how do we approach this family? Because some,

some family dynamics and some cultures, view family, and roles, and safety in a different way than what our middle class, Caucasian people do.

Participant 2 stated

I think number one is to understanding that there are different cultures, Number two understanding, how my upbringing, how my perspective, how my views on life, how my culture, perhaps, may impact my ability to fully understand someone else's culture, and how that impacts their family. And then, I think number three to try to be educated and as cognizant as possible and working with families and individuals within families about their culture and how, you know, my work may either one impact that or number two how their culture may impact, you know, the work that I'm doing with them or should impact the work that I'm doing with that individual or family.

Participant 2 also stated "I think sometimes gets confused with my impression with race and so that is a part of culture. But you know, I could have, somebody who has pretty similar ethnic backgrounds to families that might have markedly different cultures."

Participant 3 stated "to me means doing your due diligence to understand and empathize with every person you work with regardless of their background, ethics really it's just being ethical and treating everybody with the same mutual respect." Participant 3 also stated

I think it is my understanding that there is a difference in people and culture, and doing my best to be respectful of the differences in people. It is important to

honor the differences in people and to allow and accept another's beliefs, race, sexual identity, and culture.

Furthermore, Participant 3 stated

I feel like a lot of a lot of times we tend to whitewash things and ignore other cultures and really kind of make a lot of assumptions. I feel like we take our white culture, for lack of better wording, and I think we almost like put that out on, you know, like project it onto other cultures to just to make it easier on ourselves.

Participant 4 stated "you have an understanding of the different cultures in your community, and you have a respect for those folks." Participant 4 also stated "you do not prejudge any specific age group of people because of their differences or things."

Furthermore, Participant 4 stated "being able to respect people and taking time to listen to them and learn about them so that you do feel a little more competent in working with different types of people in the area."

Participant 5 stated

I think that it is trying to understand where a person comes from, what their background, whether that, you know, race or religion, or ethnicity, sure, how that plays a part in their life and everybody is different and having that understanding that everybody's life experiences are different.

Participant 6 stated, "I do try to find out a little bit about where they come from, what their practices and traditions are." Participant 7 stated, "To me cultural competency is like across-the-board, anything that can vary from one person to the next."

Participant 8 stated,

it means understanding the differences in you know, the different types of or the different communities of people and different diversity as in, you know, where you're from your ethnic background and really so that we can better understand it. So we can meet families where they are able to provide them with the best resources and or services or assistance.

Participant 9 stated, "I think it's just understanding, different cultural attitudes."

Participant 9 also stated, "Having a good understanding of different, you know, behaviors in cultures or different ways that they do things." Participant 10 stated, "Is the ability to understand that everyone's backgrounds are different and in to take that into consideration when working directly with families, parents, children, um, everyone's histories are different." Participant 10 also stated, "So gaining an understanding of how they view things, why they view things, the way that they do, what their experiences have been, um, how they perceive things, understanding that not everyone sees things the same way." Participant 11 stated, "I would say trying to learn more about other cultures and what is important to them like as far as like their traditions and family values and practices and I'm trying to take consideration of that." Participant 12 stated,

cultural competency to me means that you are trying to be aware and understand things that are different than you, whether it has to do with race, religion, other societal type belief and that you do, your best, to be competent, to understand those things that are different than you. So that way you are not offensive or disrespectful to other people.

This theme of the importance of cultural competency aligns with the research question as the perceptions of the human services case workers are vital in understanding the clients' cultural needs and beliefs. For services to have a positive impact on the clients, they need to be effective and helpful.

Theme 2: Effective Evidence-Based Services

Human service case workers employ evidence-based services to serve better and improve each client's unique circumstances, problems, and issues. Participant 4 stated, so with the evidence based practice curriculum that we're using now, we still do some parenting curriculum, that is evidence-based and it's used for everyone across the board. So you know, that's there is no difference actually as far as how it's working for clients. I don't think it's making any more of a difference culturally, but evidence-based services do work and makes a difference, as well as benefits and helps clients.

Participant 7 stated, "So evidence-based services, I think is just important no matter what; One because you're proving that that system worked and two because once you start using it, you have dated it back it." Participant 10 stated,

we can't do the same thing for each family, it does become challenging when you're in areas where services and resources aren't as abundant as they are in larger areas, but you know our evidence-based practice curriculums that we use are pretty universal. But at the same time I feel there's some flexibility within some of the practices that we have that allow us to, respect those cultural

differences and still get the family to where they need to be, and not, diverge too far off of what the programming is that we have available to us.

Participant 12 stated,

it's focusing on what the family needs and helping them identify make the plan for themselves. So in that way I could get good, it is good for any individual because you're really focusing on what they feel they need to be successful.

This theme of the evidence-based services aligns with the research question as the purpose of offering evidence-based services. The purpose of offering evidence-based services is to integrate evidence in the human services workers' practice by considering the clients' needs, wishes, and values while combining the human services workers' clinical expertise in the child welfare field (Myers et al., 2019). The use of evidence-based programs by human services case workers improves the outcomes for children and families. Evidence-based services address the clients' specific needs, together with the human services worker's knowledge, to seek prospective solutions to better serve minority clients.

Theme 3: Human Services Case Workers' Biases

The cultural bias of any human services case worker may have toward their clients may increase the clients' feelings of being marginalized and discriminated against by their human services case worker. Participant 3 stated, "I have my own biases and I'm aware of my own thoughts, we, everybody, has their own prejudices and what not."

Participant 3 also stated,

I think that we tend to offer more services to white people than we do to black people. I think we tend to be quicker to look at other family members and things like that, who are potential helpers on cases, with White people. Then we do Black people seem to be honest. I think we're quicker to bring extra supports when we're meeting with a Black family, especially depending on what neighborhood they live. In fact, I think we're quicker to pull in the police and things like that. When we go to certain neighborhoods, then we do with poor white neighborhoods. So, you know that kind of thing I think is just kind of as well; a knee jerk reaction.

Participant 3 also stated,

I remember that this biased DHS worker refused to have an interpreter available for this for this mother and it was infuriating because we're all sitting there, hearing people having this meeting, and this poor mother, is missing at least 90% off of what was being said. And it's a meeting about her and her children, and her children's safety, and how she supposed to get her children back, and what she supposed to do, and this DHS worker just wouldn't have it and she wasn't going to spend the money that was needed to hire an interpreter, violation of this woman civil rights, it was the case where it was just infuriating and just learning about that, being a part of that meeting really urged me to be more aware of where people are, and where they're coming from because we're not, we're not the same, you just can't throw a blanket on everybody.

Participant 4 stated, “At the end of the day, ultimately, people do hold their own personal biases, whether they are recognized or not recognized.” Participant 4 also stated, “Just really trying to encourage people to learn to become more knowledgeable and also, you know, encourage others to not be afraid to hold their peers accountable.” Furthermore, Participant 4 also stated, “If you catch other case workers in a situations where they are not being sensitive to cultural differences, it is vital to let their supervisors know.”

Participant 5 stated, “They have coworkers who go into minority clients home with an attitude and there is no connection what so ever with the family.” Participant 6 stated, “Due to some workers bias they don’t necessarily participate family team meetings or in a situations where you are talking about sensitive topics like race or racism and disparities and things like that bias.” Participant 12 stated, “Bias and institutional racism are uncomfortable to talk about anyway.” Participant 12 also stated,

I think that the biggest downfall is, so when workers don’t treat clients with an open mind or going in thinking that they can learn something about themselves or about just the topic in general, then it’s kind of like falls on deaf ears.

Participant 12 further stated, “Case workers must keep their own biases in check and to be mindful and respectful of what those differences are.”

This theme of the human services case workers’ bias aligns with the research question as bias contributes to a lack of cultural competence and creates cultural misunderstanding among human services case workers which contributes to human services case workers not offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to minority families.

Theme 4: Lack of Diversity in Human Services Case Workers

The lack of diversity of human services case workers within the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. may increase the clients' feelings of being marginalized and misunderstood. Participant 1 stated,

I think when they, when different cultures should see the department as a whole in our area. They're seeing a bunch of middle class, white people that don't know anything about their life and about how their culture, you know, anything about them or anything about how they see their own family, and I think sometimes we go into it. They already know that we don't know how their culture operates because we are, as a whole; it's just a big clump of a Midwestern White people.

Participant 3 stated,

I think that we're starting to see more African American workers. Not necessarily DHS workers, but I'm hoping like in our area. Like at the Youth Shelter. I've seen more African American workers; they're like employees and I think that that makes a big difference in even the youth and how they are responding to like it. I think it's just one of those things that are going to take time. To keep building, you know, it might not happen in the next 5 years or whatever, but I'm really hopeful that that should start seeing more DHS workers that are African American. I know a handful of people that I can think of right off the top of my head that have the degree to do the job and would be really good at it. But for whatever reason they're not applying or if they are applying, they're not being chosen and that sucks. So, I don't know. I think it's just going to take time.

Participant 4 stated,

I think it is that level of distrust is more prevalent among African-American children then maybe in the Caucasian children. And we're different, when we come in, because we're not black, so they feel that level of distrust is there. I think it would make a difference if we had some black DHS workers.

Participant 4 also stated, "The trust level by having a Black case worker definitely would be there more from the get-go than it would be with a Caucasian worker going in for sure."

Participant 5 stated, "We should be representative of our population and I don't see enough of that. I don't see enough of women or minorities in leadership positions."

Participant 10 stated,

we do not have minorities that are employed by the agencies just because we're in the Midwest and it's less likely to have that that type of a staff differential, I think sometimes it's hard for some families who come from the minority groups to be open and accepting and trustworthy of child welfare worker, in our areas, just because they feel that they're already not understood or they feel they're already going to be judged without being given an opportunity to really have someone understand who they are, and where they come from trust and to try to be open and honest and share that information and sometimes that's difficult for families.

Participant 10 also stated,

that first, it takes some time to build that trust before they're willing to open up and share, you know, how things are in their world, I think specifically African-

American case workers would be beneficial, family feel a little more connected or understood. Staff member then that they don't feel judged or prejudged or that they're immediately misunderstood and this just isn't going to work, we do have a few staff members that are bilingual, as far as Spanish-speaking, and our Spanish-speaking, and they typically work well, with these Spanish speaking families, but there's an understanding of that culture and how families work together and what's acceptable and what's not. And they seem to work very well with those minority families in the Hispanic community because I feel that there's already kind of a gained trust or understanding that the person, isn't coming from the outside looking in and not understanding of.

This theme of the lack of diversity of human services case workers aligns with the research question as one of the focuses of this study is to explore how to enhance and improve services offered to African American and other minority clients.

Theme 5: Cultural Upbringing and Environment

The cultural upbringing and environment of human services case workers within the child welfare system in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. has played a significant role in the perceptions and attitudes of human services case workers.

Participant 1 stated,

it can be a little bit of a shock and they're like, oh boy, how do we approach this family, some family dynamics and some cultures, view family, and roles, and safety in a different way than what our middle class Caucasian people do.

Participant 1 also stated, “When you’re not truly exposed to it and reality very often, it’s hard to put into practice.” Participant 1 further stated,

If we take a bunch of middle class, white people and put them in a room to figure out how to be more culturally diverse. We’re not going to get very far. So right, I think really pulling together. It’s probably kind of difficult to find here in this state in the Upper Midwest section of the United States to get participants.

Participant 2 stated,

understanding that there are different cultures, understanding, how my upbringing, how my perspective, how my views on life, how my culture, may impact my ability to fully understand someone else’s culture, and how that impacts their family, educated, cognizant as possible, working with families and individuals within families about their culture, impact, understanding, how my upbringing, how my perspective, how my views on life, how my culture, perhaps, may impact my ability to fully understand someone else’s culture, and how that impacts their family.

Participant 3 stated, “I feel like we take our white culture, for lack of better wording, and I think we almost like put that out on, you know, like project it onto other cultures to just to make it easier on ourselves.” Participant 4 stated,

I understand it may be different from some other folks. I’m bi-racial myself; my mother and my mother’s family came to Fort Dodge from Mexico. So I grew up in an environment that included another culture. One side of my family being Mexican and so being exposed to that and growing up trying to understand, the

differences between like my Mexican side of the family versus my white side of the family. I saw things a little differently than maybe some people.

Participant 5 stated,

I remember that my values and my upbringing are not necessarily the norm and that I need to meet people where they're at and be aware that my beliefs or I don't want to say my goals but my beliefs. My life is different than other people and that's okay, they are the experts in their own lives. We don't always have the same values.

Participant 5 also stated, "Our upbringing and our values and our childhood in our beliefs and goals while we want to like different, people are different and there is not a universal life plan for everyone." Participant 5 further stated,

am I speaking from implicit bias, or am I speaking from the evidence that's presented to me? I will talk to somebody else and make sure my perception is coming from a place of facts and evidence versus what my personal beliefs maybe my perspective is coming from evidence and facts, not internal feeling I might have.

Participant 7 stated,

sometimes I think my perception is a little bit skewed because sometimes I get that you're just a White girl knocking at my door, trying to tell me what to do. And to break through that barrier gets a little bit difficult.

This theme of the cultural upbringing and environment of human services case workers aligns with the research question as one of the focuses of this study is to explore

the perceptions how human services case workers perceive their clients and their upbringing and environment may affect their perceptions.

Theme 6: Families First Act and African American Clients

The original aim of the Families First Act was to keep children safely with their families when that family came to the attention of the child welfare system. Human services workers should begin by offering more intense evidence-based services. However, if the children need to be removed, workers are to first look at kinship placement and then a foster care placement in the most family like setting. This focuses on that child's individual needs. Furthermore, the focus of the Families First Act was to keep African American children in and with African American families. Participant 3 stated,

I think that we tend to offer more services to white people than we do to black people. I think we tend to be quicker to look at other family members and things like that, who are potential helpers on cases, with white people. Then we do black people to be honest.

Participant 4 stated,

I think that where I am frustrated, the Families First Act came in; I was so excited because, we're going to go back to the way it was when I was doing in home and we're going to start looking at those grandmothers. And we're going to look at those family members that are not happening in my area at all and it's very sad because if they would take the time to look at some of these relatives and talk to them and see that they are competent and able to do this and they probably been

doing it. Anyway, the kids were going there at the little kids were going there to stay with, Grandma a lot, anyhow, but they just putting black kids right in foster care and they're not taking the time to do, what I feel they should be doing for some of these. The whole idea of the Families First Act besides front-loading service is not going into flux. It's supposed to; you are supposed to be looking at family members, extended family.

Participant 4 also stated,

DHS human services workers are not exploring African American relatives to help with families in crisis. So less than 50% of the African American relatives are being looked at and like the back to what I was saying. I just feel that that's a huge disservice to these African American families and the kids and we should be looking at relatives who are appropriate and they're out there. Relatives are involved in some families before we even get involved. And I realized that, but once DHS gets involved with African American clients extended family should have been looked at right away. I mean, it's should be like when I worked down in Pleasant Valley's as an in-home provider. DHS has a bad reputation and people know when you're involved in a family's life. They're not trusting of the Department any more. It is just a shame.

Participant 7 stated, "African American children are removed on a higher basis than white children, but until you actually see the data in front of you, you may not notice it."

Participant 11 stated,

I would say that foster parents are predominantly white families. And so, if you did have to do a removal for a child of another race that couldn't be placed with a family member or a family or friends that was, similar to their own background, foster family, a white foster family because I think that that's what most of our families, I do recognize that there's cultural differences between so, I don't know how well, the foster families are educated on cultural diversity.

Participant 12 stated,

people from different cultures, there really isn't anything specific even using the Family First Act as a guideline, aspects of the Family First Act that are helpful certain like in the family preservation services, any time there's a new contract there's growing pains of that contract about arguing over, who's responsible it is to do what and things like that, that unfortunately, African American families who are suffering, when people are arguing whose responsibility it is to supervise a visitor, transport, a client somewhere or things like that. It's a family who's losing out when people are arguing or, you know, disagreeing about whose responsibility it is just take care of the family to get them what they need.

This theme of the Families First Act and African American clients aligns with the research question as the goals of human services case workers are to improve services offered to the families through culturally appropriate and evidence-based services.

Theme 7: Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity Training

The cultural awareness and sensitivity training that human services case workers receive from the state is an integral part of how human services case workers will learn to

interact with their African American and other minority clients. Many participants in this study had strong opinions about cultural awareness and sensitivity training. . Participant 1 stated,

we can listen to these trainings all day, you know about different cultures, but when you're not truly exposed to it and reality very often, it's hard to put into practice, So when you're not being exposed to those different cultures, very frequently, you taking the training and there with you for that day and then you go about your normal business and it kind of fizzles out.

Participant 2 stated,

I'm going to this training and it makes me feel like the bad guy, and so, is that inherence, because of how the training is rolled out, assumption that's being made on the person that's at the training, not necessarily something that's being portrayed at the training itself, active opportunity, strengthen the work, with relation to families and individuals, cultures, when you're talking about culture and doing it in a way that it doesn't necessarily, um shut ears off because of how it being perceived for whatever reason, Yes, one of the mandatory trainings is called, "Race: Power of an Illusion", the training material in itself was very good; however the trainers had a lot to be desired in how it was all presented.

Perspective in trainings are very important, I feel like I'm pretty open man. I do. But there are times where I felt like that in that training, not necessarily to the same extent that I've heard from the other workers that almost walked out after lunch for being harassed, but I felt a little like that. The trainers were blaming us

white services workers, for being born white and they're the bad people not the Blacks and that all cultural issues are due to white people in power. This was not just in the training I was in, but I talked with other coworkers who attended other scheduled "Race: Power of an Illusion" trainings. Who wants to keep listening when you feel blamed harassed?

Participant 3 stated,

I had one training called "Race: Power of an Illusion" that I went to that a lot of people that I heard from my particular office came out of angry that they felt like they were being kind of yelled at for being a white kind of thing and when I went to same training and I found it pretty, pretty educational and extremely helpful for me as a human services worker, I didn't, I didn't walk in with a chip on my shoulder, grown up, I think it made a difference, I grew up with different perceptiveness on race, I lived in the flats when I first moved to this Midwestern state and I come from a family where we were military and we've lived around different cultures. So it's not something that has ever been. Um, I don't know. I wasn't raised that with, with a lot of racial bias, So those trainings for me, helped me understand where people are coming from a little bit better, I didn't take it as like, a, a personal insult.

Participant 4 stated,

I thought they were very informative, very enlightening, and I think that it helped me a lot along the way to kind of those aha moments, you know, they would present something that I hadn't really thought about in that way. And so it, I, I

think it's very important, and I think that the ones that I attended were very good, and they are extremely helpful. I like when human services say that they didn't have prejudices or biases and then you can go to one of those trainings and they'll start talking about some things and you're like, oh my gosh, I never thought about it that way and maybe I do need to think about, you know, a few things.

Participant 5 stated,

The implicit bias training is great and I acknowledge it and I know that it exists, but I'm not 100% sure that other than what I do on my own which is talked to others, what else I can do to.

Participant 5 also stated, "There just isn't enough training on cultural sensitivity or awareness trainings." Participant 7 stated, "Any training that helps me be more culturally sensitivity or awareness is very important to me, I need to know how to go out and do my work now, culturally sensitive." Participant 7 also stated,

I think when you're trying to teach a cultural competency training and you don't have a variety of people in attendance or training it makes it very difficult, I do, remember from my Race: Power of an Illusion training is that was a majority of a white room and only a couple I think one of the trainers was African-American, I don't know if I even remember that for sure, but I do remember there was only like one or two African-American participants and they felt like every single time that a question got raised that they were supposed to answer for the whole African American race. And they were like, why do you keep looking to us to answer these questions? It shouldn't be my role in this training.

Participant 8 stated,

cultural trainings that we've received are very base level, are extremely helpful, but also easy to forget if you don't interact with that demographic very often, demographic I work in that is not extremely, culturally diverse, it's minority culturally diverse, not a lot of follow up or in-depth further, education of those, more established cultures that may be different that is sanctioned and lead and driven by my agency.

Participant 8 also stated,

take for instance the Race: Power of an Illusion training, sometimes our cultural trainings are co-opted into a if you're up this culture, you're innately bad or if you're of that culture you're a pre-designated victim, which I don't think is accurate and or the most effective way to train our staff or to educate them.

Participant 11 stated,

Race: Power of an Illusion training they made me feel guilty about being a white person and I think that it really. I mean when you get that, I mean it was an all-day training and then when that side starts getting pushed off like almost from the start of the training it really it made for a long day, I listen to the training because you don't really have any choice but to participate because there was a lot of activities and things, but it really when people start to like shut down and become closed-minded like that would be a good example of a training that would cause you to shut down and be closed minded a before lunch because of how they direct you.

Participant 11 also stated,

Training should have provided us with like useful information, like where can I can we help the families that we are working with better identify resources? Even talking to us about different values and practices between cultures, they could break like rather than having to be like one all day training. I mean, maybe you say it's a break it out in two different sessions were like, we have ICWA training for the Indian Child Welfare and you get a lot of background about. The Native Americans, I mean, why couldn't they do that with other cultures.

This theme of the cultural awareness and sensitivity training that human services case workers receive aligns with the research question because the culturally sensitive, evidence-based services they offer are proportionate to the training they receive.

Theme 8: Lack of Trust in Human Services Case Workers

The lack of trust in human services case workers in the child welfare system is prevalent in African American and minority areas. Participant 1 stated,

For me it is building trust and earning their trust, it's the idea of trust, you know, if they trust you and they know that I trust them, and then they're going to work with me. As opposed to you know, workers that are closed minded and they treat every single person the same, with that all hope of trust disappears.

Participant 1 further stated,

we need to take into consideration, what is their norm? And to what extent, we kind of accept it that they're norm and use that to our advantage and gain that trust and build on those things that they value.

Participants 3 stated,

when meeting new clients the first time, I like to have them tell me about their background, as well as why they think I was assigned their case. We discuss what child safety means to them, as well as their goals and what they want to get out of case. My plan is to build trust and rapport with my clients and then continue to build on that trust and rapport as we work together.

Participant 3 also stated, “I think that clients will work harder and try their best if there is mutual trust, as well as the worker doing their best and cultural sensitivity builds a solid foundation for the clients to work on.” Participant 3 further stated,

so, we walk in with our ideas of not understanding why they don’t trust us, and it’s still very fresh in their memories. And so, we come in with this attitude. They have a feeling of distrust for us. Well, then we get butt-hurt, because how dare they not trust me and have an attitude with me.

Participant 4 stated, “So it all comes down to trust and getting people to trust you and see you.” Participant 4 also stated,

higher level of distrust in the African American community when DHS or an in-home your contracting agency for DHS comes in the home, whole level of mistrust is passed down to the kids, much more guarded life and harder to trust someone many times more than the Caucasian families, much more guarded life and harder to trust someone many times more than the Caucasian families, trickles down to the kids, you know that level of distrust and don’t talk to DHS. Don’t tell them anything or, you know, they’re worried that, you know, kids are

going to be removed and things like that. So, I think it is that level of distrust is more prevalent among African American children than maybe in the Caucasian children.

Participant 10 stated,

I think sometimes it's hard for some families who come from the minority groups to be open and accepting and trustworthy of child welfare worker, in our areas, just because they feel that they're already not understood or they feel they're already going to be judged without being given an opportunity to really have someone understand who they are, and where they come from, trust and to try to be open and honest and share that information and sometimes that's difficult for families. That first, it takes some time to build that trust before they're willing to open up and share, you know, how things are in their world.

Participant 11 stated,

the first thing is the color of their skin, or some other things like that and it's like okay, but how are you going to approach them and still engage with them and still gain their trust and have an understanding of what's expected and how we're going to work together.

Participant 12 stated, "Imagine that you are removed from your parents. You're a Brown-colored child and you're expected to get into a car with this White person, who maybe you've been taught to not trust White people."

This theme of the lack of trust for human services case workers aligns with the research question because if human service case workers can build trust and

understanding, that improves the relationship between the client and the human services case worker.

Theme 9: Rural Versus Urban Areas and Population

Rural areas in the Upper Midwest section of the United States may contribute to the issues of lack of cultural awareness and lack of evidence-based services for African American and minority populations and clients. Participant 1 stated, “So truthfully and looking at kind of a diversity standpoint, we don’t see a whole lot of different cultures in our area.” Participant 1 also stated,

Different cultures out there that we need to be aware of and we need to be educating ourselves in as we as we come across with different cultures that we might not be familiar with our might not have a lot of information or education on.

Participant 1 further stated, “I work mainly with lower and lower middle class white families and Hispanic families and only a few Black families in my area.” Participant 1 also stated, “You heard about different cultures, but when you’re not truly exposed to it and reality very often, it’s hard to put into practice.” Participant 2 stated,

Every situation culturally is going to have a unique perspective, sensitivity training that relates to a pretty small population, not that they’re not important. I think it sends the message that, you know, culture, really. It’s just a race issue. I think that’s. I think a lot of times people get.

Participant 8 stated,

Relative to the day and where you're at, some communities that are more rural and have less diversity versus some other communities that are, you know, extremely diverse that have regular things that you have to understand to be able to best serve the population of people.

Participant 8 also stated, "It easy to forget if you don't interact with that demographic very often, demographic I work in that is not extremely, culturally diverse." Participant 10 stated,

It's pretty unlikely unless you live in an urban area that you're going to have the opportunity to work with someone that might come from the same culture or race is that family that you're engaging with, the larger Metro areas are where the African American families reside. There's a definite disadvantage to those families because they are not, you know, our minority families because they are not going to you have the opportunity to work with someone that maybe straight out might have a better understanding of what their needs or culture are.

Participant 11 stated, "It is challenging, in a lot of small towns and towns that are spread far apart, say that that creates like a lack of resources in some areas, and transportation barriers to get to the resources." Participant 11 also stated,

I've had several cases over the years but it's not like I don't consistently have diverse families on my caseload, I think that using like, evidence-based practices is my best bet for being able to meet the families like cultural or being able to accommodate cultural things for them.

This theme of rural versus urban areas and population aligns with the research question. Human service case workers in more rural areas do not have the opportunity to work with African Americans or other minority populations weekly or monthly. When human service case workers receive clients that are African American or other minority populations, they may not be culturally aware or sensitive.

Theme 10: Trust and Rapport Building

Establishing trust and building rapport are critical components for human services case workers to serve clients better and create relationships. Participant 1 stated, “My plan is to build trust and rapport with my clients and then continue to build on that trust and rapport as we work together.” Participant 1 also stated,

I do my best to meet African American and minority clients where they are and I try to educate myself on cultural differences. When meeting with an African American family, I want to know what their beliefs are and where they come from, and how they were raised; I try to interpret how they raised their children differently than my family would. We have just a bunch of different cultures within the aspect of Human Services. I mean, it’s not just a black-white issue. It’s an issue where I’ve had clients, who are deaf; DHS workers just ignored that issue.

Participant 1 further stated,

If I’m with a Spanish family and I’m not trying to accommodate their language. I’m not going to be able to build a rapport, weird limbo where it’s the superficial, on the surface, it doesn’t go any deeper, but when you take the time to understand

life and where somebody is actually coming from and how their background does impact, the way they parent and the way they live and how things are. You're able to build an actual relationship with people and you're actually able to make progress and move a case along.

Participant 3 stated,

Where as a Black family is going to be like, oh shit, here comes this white social worker who has no clue what's going on and she's going to immediately judge me. And we're going to yank the kid and we do tend to be more forceful, and on edge, when we're dealing with a Black family vs. a White family, it's just our comfort level, with a White family is, you know, they're more like us versus a Black family. We already have our guard up a little bit and they have their guard up a little bit and it doesn't make for very good rapport building.

Participant 7 stated,

Engagement, I think it plays one of the biggest pieces, meeting a family, where they're at and, um, what their understandings of things are, I think being able to understand. Where somebody's coming from off of that first interaction does a lot for rapport-building, what things are going to look like into the future life, like into the casework part of a case, if you've messed up somewhere and having been culturally sensitive. I think that can hurt the rest of your life longevity of that case. when I first meet with a family is level with simply being a human, have in common no matter what so sometimes I don't want to say that I downplay my

role as a DHS worker, I still want the family to understand the seriousness, it's just a simple engagement on a different level.

Participant 8 stated,

Depending on the perception of the agency, predisposed impression of whatever that agency or social work is, dramatically affects how the family and or the person choose to interact with any agency on that those initial contacts, work through that, build a good rapport and a better understanding if the designated family or person gives you the time and opportunities to do that, subconscious impressions of an agency, its whole are kind of built into people at the same time. And that has a dramatic effect on effectiveness and outcomes.

Participant 10 stated, "It takes some time to build that trust before they're willing to open up and share." Participant 12 stated,

How you approach families, take the time to ask them about themselves, what they believe, what is important to them? What you can do to make them feel more comfortable when you are in their presence. Just really trying to make it a point to be aware of what those differences are and respect.

This theme of trust and rapport building aligns with the research question because if human service case workers do not attempt to build rapport and a relationship with their African American and minority clients, then human service case workers will not be culturally sensitive to their African American and minority clients needs.

Discrepant Cases

There were no discrepant cases to factor into the data analysis; however, one of the participant's responses to the training question deviated from the norm. This outlier only had positive responses regarding the training the state offered. I do not know why this participant responded differently than the other participants. This outlier did not vary from the norm in responding to the other interview questions and did not require further study.

Summary

In Chapter 4, the settings for the study were discussed, along with demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the study results. In this study, the 10 themes that emerged were importance of cultural competency, effective evidence-based services, human services case workers' biases, lack of diversity in human services case workers, cultural upbringing and environment, Families First Act and African American clients, cultural awareness and sensitivity training, lack of trust of the human services case workers, rural vs. urban areas and population, and trust and rapport building.

In Chapter 5, I will review and evaluate this study with prior findings to establish whether the results of this study confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the discipline of prior research studies. Chapter 5 provides the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and the study's conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States to improve services offered to families. This study contributed to filling the gap in the literature on how the perceptions of human services case workers providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to their African American clients may improve services offered to the families. This study may help increase the knowledge of other human services case workers and stakeholders in improving services to African Americans. Through the provision of information on the benefits of using culturally sensitive, evidence-based services and referrals, African American families may be better served, and child safety and well-being may be improved in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States.

The main themes that emerged in this study were importance of cultural competency, effective evidence-based services, human services case workers' biases, lack of diversity in human services case workers, cultural upbringing and environment, Families First Act and African American clients, cultural awareness and sensitivity training, lack of trust of the human services case workers, rural versus urban areas and population, and trust and rapport building. In this chapter, I present my interpretation of the findings and the study's limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

Theme 1: Importance of Cultural Competency

The findings of this study confirmed the information from the literature review regarding the importance of cultural competency. The participants agreed that the cultural competency of human services case workers was an integral element in being able to help and understand their racial minority clients. Human services case workers who are culturally competent engage culturally diverse clients' reality in a genuine, authentic, and accepting manner (Alvarez-Hernandez & Choi, 2017; Bauer & Bai, 2018; Lovato-Hermann et al., 2017). Cultural competency allows human services case workers to feel more comfortable and be more effective in their interactions and relationship building with their clients to serve them better. The participants in the current study stated that cultural competency requires that they understand things that are different from their culture, whether it has to do with race, religion, gender, gender orientation, or any other cultural belief. The participants stated that they do their best to be competent and understand those who are different from them. The participants stated that cultural competency is the ability to understand that people's backgrounds are different and to consider that people's histories are different when working with families, parents, and children. Furthermore, the participants stated that they should be aware that some families view family, roles, and safety differently than what middle class European American human services case workers do, and they must not be offensive or disrespectful to their clients.

The theme of cultural competency aligned with the conceptual framework for this study, which was the family systems theory. Child welfare is a system for human services case workers based on perceptions, boundaries, and relationships that align with the family systems theory (Thompson et al., 2019). The theme of the importance of cultural competency supported family systems theory because the human services workers' perceptions of providing culturally sensitive services to African American families is integral in serving and helping the family dynamic and the family functioning system.

Theme 2: Effective Evidence-Based Services

The findings of this study confirmed the information from the literature review regarding effective evidence-based services. The purpose of offering evidence-based services is to incorporate evidence into the human services workers' practice by considering the clients' needs, wishes, and values while combining the human services workers' clinical expertise in the child welfare field (Myers et al., 2019). Landers et al. (2018) contended that using evidence-based programs in child welfare improves the outcomes for children and families. When the human services case workers and the clients are willing to engage in the intervention, positive interactions lead to more trust between the families and human services case workers. The participants in the current study stated that evidence-based services make a difference because evidence-based services focus on the needs of that family to be successful, which benefits the clients. The participants also stated that evidence-based services are beneficial interventions in helping the client. The participants agreed that when they use evidence-based services, they focus on what the family needs and help them make the case plan themselves. The

participants further agreed that they would be successful when evidence-based services focus on what the clients feel they need.

The findings in this study in regard to evidence-based services aligned with the conceptual framework of family systems theory. In family systems theory, triangles may occur when human services case workers engage the family. Human services case workers need to understand their role in the triangle when regulating the tasks and interventions the parents need to complete and controlling the interactions between the parent and the child (Klever, 2009; Thompson et al., 2019). Family systems theory was an appropriate lens for understanding the human services case workers' roles in their involvement with the family. Human services case workers' perceptions of providing evidence-based services to African American and racial minority families are integral in serving and helping the family dynamic and functioning system.

Theme 3: Human Services Case Workers' Biases

The findings of this study confirmed the information from the literature review regarding human services case workers' bias. Olcoñ (2019) explored numerous racial minority clients who stated that they experienced being marginalized and discriminated against by human services case workers. The current participants confirmed the bias in their work lives and the work lives of their coworkers. The participants stated that there is a need to hold themselves accountable and their coworkers accountable when they are not being sensitive to cultural differences. The participants stated that they had had numerous African American and racial minority clients who had felt that they were marginalized and discriminated against due to the bias of human services case workers. Cheng and Lo

(2018) stated that due to a lack of cultural awareness and racial bias by human services case workers, most African American families involved in the child welfare system do not receive appropriate services. The cultural bias any human services case worker may have toward their clients may increase the clients' feelings of being marginalized and discriminated against by their human services case worker. The participants in the current study stated that they have their own biases and should be aware of their thoughts and prejudices when working with clients. The participants stated that they hold their personal biases, whether they are recognized or not. The participants stated that human services case workers tend to offer more services to European American clients than to racial minority clients. The participants stated that they think human services case workers tend to be quicker to look at other family members in times of crisis who are potential helpers on cases with European American clients than with racial minority clients. The participants stated that they have coworkers who go into racial minority clients' homes with bias and poor attitudes, so there is no connection with the family. The participants stated that their coworkers need to learn to become more knowledgeable about their biases and encourage other human services case workers not to be afraid to hold their peers accountable.

The findings in this study in regard to human services case workers' bias aligned with the conceptual framework of family systems theory. Human services case workers work within a child welfare organization in which hierarchies, structures, capacity, functions, and biases are similar to a family structure. M. Bowen (1978) stated that one of the primary concepts in family systems theory focuses on the integration of self. Human

services case workers need to be aware of their biases toward families during their integration of self. The participants stated that their perceptions and acknowledgment of their biases toward racial minority and African American families are fundamental in serving and helping the family dynamic and functioning system.

Theme 4: Lack of Diversity in Human Services Case Workers

The findings of this study confirmed the information from the literature review regarding the lack of diversity in human services case workers. Olcon (2019) stated that African American and other racial minority clients preferred having human services case workers from the same ethnic or cultural background. Current participants stated that African American families feel distrust because many of the human services case workers are European American in the Upper Midwest service area addressed in the study. Having African American and racial minority human services case workers would be helpful. The participants stated that when the racial minority clients see the department, they see only European American people who do not understand their culture or values. Structural barriers such as lack of cultural awareness of social workers, institutional racism, lack of diversity of case workers, and lack of adequate resources that serve diverse populations may prevent African American and other racial minority families from receiving culturally sensitive, evidence-based services (Garcia et al., 2019; Olcoń, 2019). Current participants stated that the department should represent the population they serve. The participants stated that it is hard for people from racial minority groups in the area to be open, accepting, and trustworthy of human services case workers because

they feel they are not understood or are judged without being allowed to have someone understand who they are.

The findings in this study in regard to lack of diversity in human services case workers aligned with the conceptual framework of family systems theory. Family systems theory addresses the relationships in a family through its hierarchies, structures, capacity, and functions (Thompson et al., 2019). Family systems theory may be used to explore human services workers whose child welfare organization has hierarchies, structures, capacity, and functions similar to a family structure. The participants stated that the lack of diversity in management (hierarchies and function) does not support clients' needs. The participants stated that it is difficult for a group of middle-age European Americans to know what is best for African Americans and other people from racial minority groups. The participants stated that the lack of diversity of human services case workers (structures and capacity) helps to create mistrust for the clients, which fosters the feeling of being marginalized and discriminated against by European American human services case workers and the department.

Theme 5: Cultural Upbringing and Environment

The findings of this study confirmed the information from the literature review in regard to the importance of cultural upbringing and environment of the human services case workers. According to Colvin (2020), to work effectively with various ethnic groups and culturally diverse community members, human service case workers should understand the importance of ethnicity and how it influences thoughts, behaviors, and responses to services. The participants agreed that their cultural upbringing had played a

significant role in their perceptions of their clients and developing working relationships with them. The participants stated that human services case workers might be shocked when meeting African American, other racial minority, and culturally diverse clients because their culture differs from European American middle class values and upbringing. Bauer and Bai (2018) stated that by valuing the diversity of the clients, human services case workers could better meet the needs of their clients by delivering more appropriate and compassionate service. The participants stated that when they are not exposed to diverse cultures, it is hard to be culturally sensitive and aware. The participants stated that due to their upbringing, perspective, life views, and culture, it is hard to understand a client's different culture and how it impacts that family. The participants stated that human services case workers may project their own European American culture onto their African American and racial minority clients to make it easier on themselves by not being culturally sensitive.

The findings in this study in regard to the importance of cultural upbringing and environment of the human services case workers aligned with the conceptual framework of family systems theory. According to M. Bowen (1966), people's attitudes and beliefs about relationships play a role in their relationship patterns. Current participants stated that their beliefs, values, and upbringing are not necessarily the norms when dealing with African American and racial minority families. Participants also stated that it is essential to meet families where they are and to stay aware of the human services case workers' beliefs and not try to force those beliefs or goals on the clients or their families. The participants stated that they need to stay cognizant that their lives are different from their

racial minority clients' lives and accept that the clients are the experts in their lives. The participants stated that they do not always have the same values or beliefs as their African American or culturally diverse clients.

Theme 6: Families First Act and African American Clients

The findings of this study confirmed the information from the literature review regarding the Families First Act and the relationship between African American clients and human services case workers. The Family First Prevention Services Act is aimed at African American families to keep children safely with their families when the families come to the attention of the child welfare system. If the children need to be removed, workers are to look at kinship placement and then a foster care placement in the most family-like setting, which focuses on that child's individual needs (Lindell et al., 2020; Yampolskaya et al., 2020). Current participants stated that human services case workers must use evidence-based services to encourage those children and families to receive services that have demonstrated success in assisting families. The participants stated that human services case workers in this Upper Midwest urban setting tend to offer more services to European American families than to African American families.

Furthermore, the participants stated that human services case workers tend to look at other family members or placements with European American families than with African American families. The participants stated that the Families First Act directives are not being adhered to because human services case workers are not exploring African American relatives to help families in crisis. The participants stated that once the department gets involved with African American clients, the extended family should look

for familial support and possible placement for children who are removed from their parents. However, the participants stated that less than 50% of the African American relatives are being looked at, which is a disservice to the African American families. The participants stated that African American children are removed at a higher rate than European American children. However, until human services case workers see the data in front of them, they may not notice the facts.

The findings in this study regarding Families First Act and African American clients aligned with the family systems theory conceptual framework. According to family systems theory, when families are in crisis, the emotional responsiveness process in the family ego mass may involve all nuclear family, extended family members, nonfamily members, and representatives of social service agencies and the courts (Bowen, 1966). The Family First Act could counterbalance to relieve the crisis and help the family by including extended family members, nonfamily members, human services case workers, and appropriate culturally sensitive and evidence-based services. However, according to the participants, this is not adequately done in this Upper Midwest service area. The participants stated that any time the service providers sign new contracts, there are disruptions in services. At the same time, roles and responsibilities are defined between the department and the contracting service providers. The participants stated that when human services case workers and service providers are disagreeing on whose responsibility it is to supervise a visit, transport a client, do home inspections, locate extended family members, or relative placements, it is the family who is not receiving adequate services during this transition period.

Theme 7: Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity Training

The findings of this study confirmed the information from the literature review regarding the cultural awareness and sensitivity training of human services case workers. According to Colvin (2020), to work effectively with various ethnic groups and culturally diverse community members, human services case workers should understand the importance of ethnicity and how it influences thoughts, behaviors, and responses to services. Cultural awareness and sensitivity is the process by which human services case workers interact respectfully and effectively with people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a way that will recognize, affirm and value the individual or family (Lovato-Hermann et al., 2017). Cultural awareness and sensitivity training should allow human services case workers to feel more comfortable, thereby being more effective in their interactions and relationship with their African American and racial minority clients. The participants stated that the primary and mandatory training required by the state is the Race: Power of an Illusion training. The participants negatively perceived the Race: Power of an Illusion training. The participants stated that the trainers made them feel guilty about being European American. The participants stated that the state training needs to be improved. In the mandatory cultural competency training, The Power: of an Illusion, the participants stated that they felt unwarranted bias from the trainers. The participant's consensus was negative, despite some helpful information and literature.

The findings in this study in regard to cultural awareness and sensitivity training of human services case workers aligned with the conceptual framework of family systems

theory. The relationship between a human service case worker and his or her client may determine the client's success or failure in the child welfare system (Thompson et al., 2019; Thompson & Colvin, 2017). The relationship between human services case workers and minority clients can be enhanced by human services case workers who are culturally aware and sensitive toward their minority clients. When human services case workers attend mandatory training where they perceive negative bias from the trainers for being European American, their perceptions, boundaries, and relationship negatively impact their roles of serving African American and minority clients with cultural awareness and sensitivity. The participants stated that they desire effective culturally sensitivity or awareness training so that they can better serve their minority clients by being more culturally sensitive.

Theme 8: Lack of Trust in Human Services Case Workers

The findings of this study confirmed the information from the literature review regarding the lack of trust of the human services case workers. There is a need for human service case workers to work in partnership with their minority clients, and that may be accomplished by building trust and rapport between themselves and their minority clients (Alvarez-Hernandez & Choi, 2017; Olcoń, 2019). The participants stated that there is a higher distrust in the African American community when human services case workers who represent DHS come into their homes. The family's past experiences with the child welfare system may have left them feeling that they are a marginalized group of individuals who have experienced bias, trauma, mistrust, stigma, and racial discrimination at the hands of the child welfare system (Garcia et al., 2018). The

participants stated that this distrust is passed down to African American children, so they learn to be guarded and have been told not to speak with human services case workers about things happening in their homes. The participants stated that the lack of trust comes from the high number of African American children who are removed from their parents and families. The participants stated that there is a lack of trust from families from minority groups, so they are not open, accepting, or trustworthy of their human services case worker. The participants stated that African American and minority clients who feel misunderstood or negatively judged might create barriers in this Upper Midwest service area. Being open and honest and sharing their information can be difficult for minority families. The participants stated that when human services case workers are closed mind, they may perceive that minority families do not trust them.

The findings in this study regarding lack of trust of the human services case workers aligned with the conceptual framework of family systems theory for this basic qualitative study. According to M. Bowen (1966), people's attitudes and beliefs about relationships play a role in their relationship patterns. When there is a lack of trust in human services case workers by their African American and minority clients, the opportunity of developing the needed working relationship is absent. The participants stated that getting clients to trust them and see them as a helper is important. The participants stated that the first thing that European American human services case workers and African American clients may see is the color of others' skin, which may affect how are they going to approach each other and engage with each other to gain trust and determine how are they going to work together.

Theme 9: Rural Versus Urban Areas and Population

The findings of this study confirmed the information from the literature review regarding the regarding rural versus urban areas and populations that human services case workers serve. The geographic location of African American families appears to be a risk factor for the disproportionate reporting of African American families to child welfare services in urban heterogeneous neighborhoods when African American family represents a visible minority in the general population and in rural geographic settings are related to greater rates of child abuse reporting for Black youth, but not for White youth (Cénat et al., 2021). Some appropriate services are available in rural areas, such as early intervention programs; however, in many rural areas, services and resources may be unavailable to families or children (Cheng & Lo, 2018; Garcia et al., 2016). The participants stated that it is challenging in some small towns and towns that are spread far apart versus urban areas, as there is a lack of resources in rural areas and transportation barriers to get the resources to the clients. The participants stated that unless minority clients live in an urban area, then minority clients are not going to have the opportunity to work with service providers who might come from the same culture or race. The participants stated that there may be a disadvantage for African American families in rural areas in the this Upper Midwest area because African American families may not have the opportunity to work with human services case workers or service providers that might have a better understanding of what African American families need. The participants stated that it easy for human services case workers to forget to be culturally sensitive or culturally aware if European American human services case worker do not

interact with that minority population often and that some rural demographic areas are not culturally diverse in this Upper Midwest service area.

The findings in this study regarding rural versus urban areas and populations served by human services case workers aligned with the conceptual framework of family systems theory. The perceptions of human services case workers in the child welfare field affect the children and their families that human services case workers serve. When human services case workers have negative perceptions and negative boundaries in their relationship with their clients, it may be the family who suffers (Thompson et al., 2019). The participants stated that many human services case workers mainly serve lower and lower middle class White and Hispanic families and only a few African American families in this Upper Midwest service area. The participants stated that some European American human services case workers may have only heard about different cultures. However, it is hard to put cultural sensitivity into practice when European American human services case workers are not exposed to different cultures.

Theme 10: Trust and Rapport Building

The findings of this study confirmed the information from the literature review regarding the regarding trust and rapport building of the human services case workers with their clients. The differences between people due to race, ethnicity, and culture, as well as from family background and individual experience, all contribute to distrust (Be'eri et al., 2019). Developing a working relationship between human services case workers and their minority clients begins with the human services case workers' ability to develop trust and rapport with their clients (Garcia, 2018). When both the human services

case workers and their African American and minority clients are willing to engage in the interventions, positive interactions lead to more trust, which increases the cultural relationship between the families and human service workers. The participants stated that human services case workers' plan of action to build a positive relationship begins with building trust and rapport with their clients and then continue to build on that trust and rapport as they work together. The participants stated that when human services case workers meet with an African American or culturally different family for the first time, they should get to know what that families' beliefs are, where they come from, and how they were raised. Human services case workers should try to interpret how the family has raised their children differently than their own family. The participants stated that they have many different cultures within the aspect of human services in the Upper Midwest service area. The participants stated that some human services case workers do not try to build a rapport and their interactions with clients are superficial. However, when human services case workers take the time to understand where somebody is coming from and how their background impacts the way they parent and live, they can build a relationship with people based on trust and be able to make progress and help families.

The findings in this study in regard to trust and rapport building by human services case workers aligned with the conceptual framework of family systems theory. Often when a human service worker becomes involved with a family, there is usually a shift in power, with the human service worker becoming the authoritative figure for the household (Holt & Kelly, 2016; Mackenzie et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2019). Human services case workers could eliminate this power struggle within the family by building

trust and rapport with the family. The participants stated that building trust and rapport supports the engagement process when first meeting the family. The participants stated that the human services case workers and minority clients' first interaction does a lot for rapport-building, and it may be a determining factor on how interactions are going to look in the future life, as well as the successful completion of the racial minority families case plan. The participants stated that some human services case workers may make mistakes in their initial interactions with racial minority clients or may not be culturally sensitive. The participants stated that poor rapport and lack of trust between European American human services case workers and racial minority clients might hurt the rest of the life longevity of that case and not provide positive outcomes for racial minority families. The participants stated that building trust and rapport is simply being human and acknowledging what the human services case worker and the clients have in common. However, human services case worker needs to avoid downplaying their role as human services case worker, as clients need to understand the seriousness of the situation.

Limitations of the Study

There were limitations in this study. There were limitations in the methodology of this study. There is a potential limitation in transferability as this study included the perceptions of 12 human services case workers from one state in the Upper Midwest of the United States. Sykes et al. (2018) recommended sample size of between three and 16 participants in qualitative studies. According to Saldana (2016), transferability may combine other studies to transfer and compare the theory and study. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), it is the reader of the study and not the researcher who

makes the decision if transferability is met based on the framework and settings of the research process. Therefore, transferability of the findings of this study may be a limitation. A limitation of this study may include generalizability, as there were a limited number of participants to gather perceptions and experiences from within this study, and the outcomes may not be considered as typical perceptions and experiences of all human services case workers. Another limitation of this study may include researcher bias. My previous working experience may lead to potential bias while collecting and analyzing the data. To mitigate any of my own biases from skewing data, I bracketed my preconceived biases and ideas in a research journal. A limitation in this study may have been the outlier who only had positive responses regarding the cultural awareness training offered by the state. The outlier may have attended an earlier Race: Power of an Illusion training with different trainers or the outlier may not have wanted to state any complaints against their employer.

Recommendations

I conducted this study to understand the perceptions of human service case workers who offered culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients in a single state in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States to improve services offered to families. If this study was to be replicated, I would recommend expanding the scope of this study to include multiple states in an Upper Midwest setting in the United States to improve generalizability and increase the array of data collected. Recommendations for further research include qualitative studies using the perceptions of African American clients receiving culturally appropriate and

evidence-based services to explore if services, interventions, levels of trust, and relationships with their human service case workers have improved.

Another recommendation for future research would be to conduct a study using a qualitative case study method. Using a qualitative case study would be an effective way to focus exploratory studies on gathering information on the real-life experiences of human services case workers. The fundamental nature of a case study is that it tries to clarify a decision or set of decisions, why they were taken, how they were implemented, and what the results were (Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018). A qualitative case study method would allow the researcher to experience the participants' reality as individuals in their child welfare environment and allow for more rich and detailed data.

An additional recommendation for future research would be to conduct a study using a phenomenological research methodology. A phenomenological approach focuses on understanding how firsthand experiences and personal views influence how individuals interpret their social environment. A phenomenological approach may be used to develop an understanding of the perspective of participants' lived experiences. Phenomenology studies present a distinctive methodology for probing into the lived experience of the participants (Frechette et al., 2020). A phenomenological research methodology might provide more descriptive experiences from human services case workers' perceptions of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American clients.

Implications

This study promotes positive social change in that it creates a better understanding of human services case workers and the perceptions of their experiences of offering culturally appropriate, evidence-based services to their African American and racial minority clients in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the United States to improve services offered to families. This study further promotes positive social change by helping increase the knowledge of offering practical, culturally appropriate, evidence-based services for other human services case workers, stakeholders, policymakers, management, and decision-makers in the child welfare system and improving services offered to African American and other racial minority clients. Providing helpful information on the benefits of using culturally sensitive, evidence-based services and interventions, African American families may be better served, and child safety and wellbeing could be improved in the child welfare system in the United States (Garcia et al., 2019). Furthermore, this study promotes positive social change by developing human services case workers who are culturally appropriate and work to build positive relationships with their African American clients, which may have a positive social impact on reducing the disproportionality of African American children in the child welfare system.

The practice recommendations are for other human services case workers and community service providers in the child welfare system to offer culturally appropriate and evidence-based services to their African American and racial minority clients to help reduce the disproportionality of African American and racial minority families in a child

welfare foster care system. Culturally appropriate services may allow racial minority families to address the needs brought to the child welfare system's attention and achieve the goals required by their human service case workers to parent their children safely (Olcoń, 2019).

Conclusion

The perceptions of human services case workers have a direct bearing on their professional and personal lives and their abilities to develop positive and effective relationships with African American and racial minority clients and families. When child welfare human services case workers are involved with families, it is typically at a time of crisis and chaos for the family. The relationships that human services case workers build with families may be one of the deciding factors of whether that family becomes more robust and healthier, the crisis is relieved, or the removal of the children from their homes becomes necessary. Based on this study, when human services case workers develop a positive relationship with their African American and racial minority families built on cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and trust, their African American and minority clients will be better served.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Good evening

I would like to thank you for participating in this qualitative research study. My name is John Dyrkacz, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting a research study on the perceptions of human services case workers. The purpose of this study is to explore human service case workers' perceptions of working with clients. This telephonic or Zoom interview process will take about 45 to 60 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, as I want to hear about your experiences and perceptions. You may skip a question any time you feel uncomfortable answering. I want you to be candid. It is hoped that the findings will contribute useful information to address issues identified in the information you provide. The comments you provide are confidential; I will not use your name in any description or summary that I write. I will also record this interview to help me make sure my notes and transcriptions are accurate. If at any time you become uncomfortable or want to stop this interview at any time without any consequences. I should already have consent forms for your participation in this study. (I will confirm that consent forms are obtained). Do I have your permission to record this interview? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions:

- 1) As a human services worker, how would you describe your experiences of working within the child welfare system an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S.?
- 2) What does cultural competency mean to you?

- 3) What role does cultural competency play in your day-to-day work experience as a human services worker in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S.?
- 4) How do you understand and interpret the meaning of culture and cultural differences about the clients you serve?
 - a. How do you think other human service workers understand and interpret the meaning of culture and cultural differences in the clients they serve?
- 5) How does the cultural differences impact the engagement process and the service delivery process?
- 6) In what ways do culturally sensitive, evidence-based services currently impact your minority clients?
- 7) As a human services worker, how would you describe the benefits of the cultural sensitivity/awareness trainings you have received from this state in the Upper Midwest section of the United States?
 - a. How would you describe the disadvantages of the cultural sensitivity/awareness trainings you have received from this state in the Upper Midwest section of the United States?
 - b. Where have you seen the gaps in cultural sensitivity/awareness trainings?
- 8) How do you think the delivery of services impact minority children and Caucasian children and their families differently in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S.?

- 9) What are your perceptions of providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to African American families and children in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S.?
 - a. How would you describe the improvements in services to African American families?
- 10) What other thoughts or ideas would you like to share with me concerning cultural competency as a human services worker?

This concludes our interview today. Thank you for participating in this research study. Do you have any final thoughts or any questions? Feel free to contact me if you have any concerns. I will contact you, if we need to follow up for further discussion about any of your answers. Thank you again for your time and for participating in this study.

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer



RECRUITMENT FLYER

Interview study seeks Human Services Case Workers in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. child welfare system

For this study, you are invited to share your perceptions of providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based services to African American families and children in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. child welfare system to improve services to families

About the study:

- One 45-to-60-minute telephone or ZOOM semi-structured interview that will be audio recorded

- To protect your privacy, the published study would use fake names

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Human Services Case Workers in an Upper Midwest urban setting in the U.S. child welfare system
- 21 years old or older

These interviews are part of the doctoral study for John Dyrkacz, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during March and April 2022.

**To confidentially volunteer, contact the
researcher: John Dyrkacz
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