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Exploring African American Single Mothers' Experiences with Child Welfare System

Paul J. Melbourne
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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Paul Melbourne

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Exploring African American Single Mothers' Experiences with Child Welfare System

by

Paul Melbourne

MA, City of New York Baruch College, 2012

BA, University of the West Indies, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

African Americans are overrepresented in the child welfare system in New York City (NYC). They face racial and ethnic bias, complex procedures, and policies that govern child welfare. The main research question for this study explored the experiences of African American single mothers with the child welfare system. This qualitative study was guided by policy feedback theory; data were gathered from 10 African American single mothers who have had experiences with child welfare investigation within the past 10 years. Participants were interviewed using semistructured questions designed to capture their experiences with the child welfare system. The data were coded for themes and patterns within the responses provided. The study's key findings revealed that African American single mothers in the child welfare system faced significant concerns around implicit bias, the lack of trust for child welfare workers, and limited accessibility to resources. This study reflected the need for positive social changes and reforms in the child welfare system sensitive to African American single mothers' cultural and social-economic needs. The data may provide researchers and policymakers with a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of child welfare on African Americans in NYC, which may ignite ideas for further research or policies that create social change among this group within the child welfare system.

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Dedication

All gratefulness and praise be on to God, who has kept me through this process and helped me to maintain the strength and confidence needed to complete this study. This degree is dedicated to my father, the late Rev. Ivis Melbourne, and my mother, Mrs. Etheline Melbourne, who left an impression on my life to keep striving toward excellence. I would also like to thank my wife, Mrs. Abigail Brizan-Melbourne, and my children, Koreen Melbourne and Lily Melbourne for the support in managing and dealing with my attention to this study, which at times has impeded our family time.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	3
Purpose Statement.....	5
Research Questions.....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Policy Feedback Theory	6
Critical Race Theory	6
Bowens Family System Theory	7
Nature of the Study	8
Operational Definitions.....	8
Assumptions.....	10
Scope and Delimitations	11
Limitations	12
Significance.....	13
Summary.....	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review	16
Literature Search Strategy.....	16
Theoretical Foundation.....	17

Policy Feedback Theory	17
Critical Race Theory	20
Bowen’s Family Systems Theory	24
Theories’ Relevance.....	26
Literature Review Related to Key Concepts.....	29
Historical Development of Child Welfare	29
ACS History and Reforms	51
New York Law on Child Abuse.....	54
Federal Funding for Child Maltreatment	58
Summary	60
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	62
Research Design and Rationale	62
Role of the Researcher	63
Methodology.....	64
Description of Research Population.....	64
Sample Recruitment.....	65
Procedures for Data Collection.....	66
Data Analysis Plan	71
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	73
Credibility	74
Transferability.....	74
Dependability.....	75

Confirmability.....	75
Content Validity.....	76
Ethical Considerations	76
Summary.....	79
Chapter 4: Results.....	80
Setting.....	81
Study Demographics.....	81
Data Collection Procedures.....	83
Data Analysis Procedures	84
Identifying Themes	85
Societal Emotional Process—Financial Struggles and Absent Fathers	91
Citizenship—Forced Participation.....	93
Lack of Understanding Child Welfare Policies—Form of Governance.....	94
Political Agendas—Fear and Stigma of the Child Welfare System	96
Power of Groups—Distrust in the Child Welfare System	97
Interest Convergence—Cycle of Oppression.....	98
Social Construction—Stereotyping	99
Equity and Equality and Implicit Bias	101
Voice of Color—Partnership and Education	103
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	105
Credibility	105
Transferability.....	105

Dependability	105
Confirmability.....	106
Summary	106
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	108
Summary of the Findings.....	108
Interpretation of Findings	110
Financial Struggles/Childhood Trauma	110
Implicit Bias.....	110
Limitations of the Study.....	117
Recommendations.....	119
Future Research	120
Other Recommendations.....	121
Positive Social Change	123
Implications for Policy Reform and Policy Design	123
Methodological Implications	125
Conclusion	127
References.....	129
Appendix: Interview Guide and Tools.....	149

List of Tables

Table 1. Theories Related to Interview Questions.....	70
Table 2. Preliminary Coding Framework	72
Table 3. Participant Demographics.....	82
Table 4. Codes and Themes	87
Table 5. References to Themes.....	89
Table 6. References to Sentiments.....	90

List of Figures

Figure 1. Relationship Between Theories..... 27

Figure 2. References to Partnership and Education by Participant..... 116

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Child abuse and maltreatment have been a worldwide issue that varies from country to country in definition, policies, and approaches to addressing. The World Health Organization [WHO] (2019) cited that 1 in 5 women in the world experienced child physical abuse as a child, and 1 in 13 men have experienced sexual abuse. Furthermore, in 2018, 36% of the children in the world faced emotional abuse, and 23% were affected by physical abuse. Child abuse occurs worldwide due to past parental abuse, drug abuse, unemployment, cultural norms, and lack of social and economic health policies (WHO, 2019). In the United States, child maltreatment continues to be a significant issue, with a 3% increase in child abuse from 2012 to 2016 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2018). In 2017, there were 3.5 million reports of child maltreatment. Findings of child maltreatment accounted for 17% of the total reports, and 1,720 child deaths occurred from abuse and neglect, which is a rate of 2.32 per every 100,000 children each year (U.S. DHHS, 2018). Thus, there is a continued need for child protection research and programs to reduce child maltreatment in the United States.

In this chapter I introduce the prevalence and background of child abuse. The following parts of this chapter focus on the problem statement and the purpose of this study. I also provide an overview of the nature, scope, significance, research questions, definitions, terms, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and a summary of the chapter.

Background

African American families have the second highest rate of child maltreatment in the United States with 14.0 per every 1,000 compared to American Indian children with 15.2 per every 1,000 (U.S. DHHS, 2018). Like other minority groups, African American families have faced several challenges compared to Caucasian families involved in the child welfare system related to income, resources, history, culture, and education (Curtis & Denby, 2011; Nancy, 2004). Child welfare data in the United States shows that African Americans represent the highest rates of child abuse compared to other racial groups and are also overrepresented in the child welfare system. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2016), African Americans have a higher racial disproportionality index of 1.6 compared to other ethnic groups within the child welfare continuum, where an index of 1.0 indicates that a specific race is proportionate to the general population in the child welfare system.

The overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system has stirred several researchers' interests in exploring and finding out the causes, effects, and implications to this group at each stage of the child welfare continuum (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014). There have been concerns about the possible impact of racial bias in the child welfare system. For instance, child welfare caseworkers are more likely to remove African American children from homes than children of other races or ethnic backgrounds (Font, 2012; Rynders, 2019). African American single mothers face past and present social and economic barriers to social mobility and the required task to

follow child welfare policies (Wheeler-Bell, 2018). Both African American and Hispanic single mothers are at a higher risk of living in poverty than Caucasian and Asian single mothers (Damaske et al., 2019). Poverty has been a significant challenge for African American single mothers who have the responsibility to protect their children in an environment in which social and economic constraints can impact their child-rearing obligations. Single parent mothers are at a higher risk of committing acts of child maltreatment because they face issues with lower income and lack support, which leads to higher stress and depression (Barnhart & McGuire-Jack, 2016).

Understanding the social and economic challenges and struggles of African American single mothers is essential to interpreting their experiences with child welfare policies. In New York State, African Americans have the highest rate of child abuse, which is 16.9 per every 1,000 children (U.S. DHHS, 2018). The New York Office of Children and Families (N.Y. OCFS) 2018 foster care report showed the disparity between races in the child welfare system as 41% of African American children were in foster care compared with 24% of children who are Caucasian (N.Y. OCFS, 2018). Therefore, this study focused on the experience of African American mothers in New York regarding the child welfare system.

Problem Statement

The New York City (NYC) Mayor's Management Report of 2019 revealed that ACS investigates over 55,000 cases a year, which directly impacted 6% of the total population of NYC each year. Although there was a 0.5% decline in child protective

reports in 2019, there was a concern that it is above the fiscal target of 14% (NYC Mayors Operations Office, 2019). There was a further concern of racial and ethnic bias faced by African American families, impacting their overrepresentation in the child welfare system. Racial disproportionality among African Americans has attributed to historical racial inequities and social issues of a minority group that placed children at risk of abuse and maltreatment (Petersen et al., 2014). Implicit bias is a significant cause of the disproportionality of African Americans in the child welfare system (Rynders, 2019). Through each decision-making process within the child welfare system, caseworkers are more likely to remove children and indicate cases as subjectivity occurs because of stereotypes about African Americans (Rynders, 2019). Although facing issues of racial disparity and disproportionality in the child welfare system, African Americans have contended with understanding the complex child welfare system of laws and procedures that govern it (Thompson et al., 2019). Varying definitions, laws, and policies between states affect the reporting of child abuse and neglect and the awareness and consensus held on child abuse policy (Petersen et al., 2014).

Prior research on child abuse among African Americans has focused on the causes of child abuse and has depicted the impact of public awareness of child welfare policies. Prior research on child abuse mainly focused on analyzing causes of abuse and risk factors, such as poverty, substance abuse, crime, and unemployment (Hill, 2008). Past studies aimed to understand or identify the causes of African Americans' involvement in the child welfare system. This research, however, was aimed at helping policymakers and

researchers gain insight into viewpoints held by African American single mothers about the child welfare system.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and understand African American single mothers' experiences with the complex procedures and policies that govern the investigation of child abuse in NYC. The results may provide policymakers with valuable feedback on existing policies from the viewpoint of African American single mothers. Policymakers may use the data from the research to improve the practices of child protective specialists when engaging African Americans within the child welfare system. The results of the study may also lead to tailored reforms needed to meet the cultural needs of African American families involved in the child welfare system. The findings from this research may further contribute to existing qualitative research or comparative studies on analyzing the experiences of some African American single mothers with the child welfare system. This may create the opportunity to explore more research on African Americans and other minority groups to understand and formulate a culturally sensitive approach to child welfare policies.

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of NYC African American single mothers of the child protection policies on their child abuse cases?
2. What are African American single mothers' views on the solutions needed to improve their experiences with the child welfare system?

Theoretical Framework

Policy Feedback Theory

Public policy affects and influences political agendas, which shifts to the feedback or public opinion provided on the policy (Vannoni, 2019). Policy Feedback Theory (PFT) is used to explore the role of civic engagement, the form of governance, power or groups, and politics in influencing public policy (Mettler & SoRelle 2014). PFT considers the political influences that affect policy and whether the existing policies influence civic engagement and address the needs of interest groups that the policy affects (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Policy feedback can generate and influence group support and civic participation based on perspectives on whether the government is responsive to their needs (Mettler, 2019). Public approval of government policy may build trust and change attitudes toward political engagement (Maltby, 2017). For this research, PFT was used as the framework, with critical race theory (CRT) and Bowen's family systems theory (BFST) to further analyze policy feedback by exploring the impact of racism and family interactions with the child welfare system. PFT set the foundation on understanding the role African Americans play in providing feedback to child welfare policy development while examining the impact of CRT and FST in shaping views held by the group.

Critical Race Theory

CRT provides relevance to the family as a unit and the social interactions with organizations that may have shaped the African American family perspectives on racial groups (Burt et al., 2012). CRT was used in the study to assess the family interactions

with the child welfare system and whether racial and implicit biases may have impacted the family belief system. It is important for scholars to explore policy feedback by linking behavior and attitudes between the mass public and elites to race (Michener, 2019). CRT has guided the assessment of equity and discrimination when exploring concepts of disproportionality and disparity of African Americans within the child welfare system. It is important to assess the role of equity in providing services to prevent the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system, and CRT can help evaluate the impact of racism on the equal distribution of services (Gourdine, 2019). CRT was utilized to assess whether the policies that govern child protective investigations are sensitive to the needs of African Americans or whether the approach only benefits a dominant or race. Through the lens of African Americans single mothers, the study identified the themes and patterns of the ideologies they view as the role of policy and power of the courts when involved in child protective investigations.

Bowens Family System Theory

BFST shows the interconnected relationships held within the family unit and how they impact each other and the family involvement in society (Thompson et al., 2019). The theory helps develop policymakers' awareness of the family as an emotional unit and how child welfare families may impact each relationship held within the structure. Based on BFST, the interactions with social organizations such as child welfare agencies may impact experiences held and feedback provided to researchers and policyholders.

Nature of the Study

I used the qualitative methodology to gather the experiences of African American single mothers from their prior engagement and interactions with child protective investigations. I utilized a naturalistic approach to collecting data for this study. The qualitative method is an in-depth inquiry to gather the sensitive meanings of people associated with phenomena (Patton, 2015). This method involves using open-ended questions by the researcher to infer the meanings held on concepts from respondents (Patton, 2015).

I collected data through telephone and face-to-face interviews with a sample of 10 African American single mothers who live in the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens. Participants selected had prior involvement in child welfare investigations in the past ten years. I utilized purposive sampling in selecting the sample. The data collected were coded and analyzed. The data were coded initially for concepts within the framework of the study and further coded for themes and patterns.

Operational Definitions

The study used the definitions of child abuse and maltreatment, theory, and policy that have a universal application of meaning and depth.

Child abuse: The act of a parent or caregiver action or inaction that results in the severe injury of a child (Administration for children Services [ACS], 2020). Primavera and Jackson (2019) defined child physical abuse as non-accidental injuries inflicted on

children in the forms of kicking, punching, burning, biting, or punching that create harm or that may have resulted from a parent's action of over disciplining a child.

Child maltreatment: Refers to acts of abuse and neglect that occur with children under the age of 18 in the form of physical, emotional sex abuse, sexual exploitation, or any harm to a child's wellbeing. However, under New York State, maltreatment is defined as neglect (N.Y. OCFS, 2020).

Child neglect: ACS (2020) described neglect as a parent's failure to meet a child's need to a point where the child's safety or health is in danger of serious harm. Failure to meet the child's needs may be in the form of failure to provide adequate food, clothing, or shelter or neglect in a child's health and educational needs. A parent's misuse of drugs or alcohol and failing to provide adequate supervision are other forms of neglect.

Corporal punishment: Any act used by parents or guardians that uses physical force to cause pain to a child (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2007, as cited in Perrin et al., 2017).

Cultural competency: Refers to the diversity approaches made by public agencies to implement and integrate policies and programs that are relevant to successful service outcomes (Rice & Mathews, 2014).

Implicit bias: This is the bias that occurs when society's stereotypes impact a person's action without conscious recognition of its occurrence (Rynders, 2019).

Indicated cases: An indicated case means that after a 60-day investigation, there is a fair preponderance of evidence to state or prove child abuse or neglect (ACS, 2021).

Racial disproportionality: This occurs when a racial or ethnic group is overrepresented compared to its percentage in the total population (U.S. DHHS, 2016).

Unfounded case: An unfounded case means that there is not a fair preponderance of evidence that supports a claim of child abuse or neglect (ACS, 2021).

Assumptions

Research assumptions refer to researchers' values and possible beliefs, which may be true and impact the topic or research approach selected. Understanding assumptions helps to differentiate between a researcher's beliefs and opinions about ideas supported by the study (Rudestam, 2015). Being involved in child protection as a child protection manager and working with various communities in New York has led to some assumptions. The first assumption was that there is an overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system in the United States. The data from many child welfare agencies in the United States show an overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system (Jagers et al., 2017; Ononde et al., 2014).

The second assumption was that there is an overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system compared to other groups. The overrepresentation of African Americans may be due to limited resources to support the family. African Americans continue to struggle with poverty and institutional biases compared to Caucasian families (Child Trends, 2019). Each social interaction with each societal problem may have impacted parenting decisions that result in child abuse.

There is a high reliance on African American families for support through social safety nets, which has resulted in the third assumption that there is a likelihood these families may experience unfair treatment. The fourth assumption was that most African Americans are more likely to use corporal punishment of spanking than any other race (Pew Research Center, 2015). I explored African American single mothers' experiences with child protection policies in NYC, focusing on African Americans with the highest reported child abuse and maltreatment rates in the United States.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations are efforts made by the researcher during the study plan of what will be included or excluded throughout each step of the research process (Simon & Goes, 2013). The study addressed African American single mothers' issues in dealing with child welfare's complex policies and procedures by exploring their lived experiences. African American single mothers made up the study population. A high percentage of African American children are associated with single-parent homes in which they provide most of the caretaking responsibilities for their children (Casey Foundation, 2019; Goodrum et al., 2012), and 50% of African American single mothers and their children live in poverty (Graves, 2017). The selection of this population was appropriate for the study compared to other research groups because African American single mothers face challenges of dealing with the complexity of the child welfare system along with having the highest number of children involved in the system.

This study utilized a qualitative approach to gather the experiences of African American single mothers. One goal of the research is to use the results of this study to better inform other studies with similar topics and samples. I conducted a detailed and contextual interview to achieve transferability. The population size of 10–15 persons chosen for the research meets the criteria for a qualitative study. There is a basis for duplicating the study with another sample for transferability. I drew comparisons from my professional experience and existing literature to further support the data transferability. The selection criteria for the study sample included only African American single mothers with closed indicated or unfounded cases.

Limitations

Several limitations may occur when researching child abuse with participants who have direct experience with the child protection service system. Limitations occurred around recruiting participants for the study from within specific geographic locations that depict the African American community. Some geographical areas lacked available community-based organization sites that would have been valuable to recruitment and interviewing African American single mothers. The COVID-19 pandemic also placed restrictions on finding opened community-based organization locations and mainly encourage electronic contact with staff or clients.

I made initial disclosures regarding the study before conducting interviews with the participants. I also informed participants of my affiliation and years of experience with child protection and my current role as a child protective manager. I also gave

participants the voluntary option to participate in research via telephone interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was aware that negative experiences with the child protective agency resulted in anger, fear, or anxiety of some participants during the interview process. Additionally, I was aware that my presence during the interviews might lead to biased responses (Creswell, 2009).

Significance

I explored African American single mothers' experiences with complex child welfare policies and procedures in NYC. The study was designed to inform policymakers and researchers on African American single mothers' experiences with child protection policies. The findings of this research are intended to create positive social change to improve child protection outcomes for African Americans. Walden University (2019) described the positive social change is the process of creating and facilitating improvement in people by participating in actions that encourage and promote the development of institutions, organizations, and communities (Walden University, 2019). The findings may shape future policy and reforms to help reduce child abuse among African Americans. Other researchers may also use this study to examine further the diversity among African American groups and those of different ethnic groups. Researchers must explore whether the study area will lead to a promising future for researchers under that topic or field of study (Reis, 1999). It is the hope that this research may create positive change for African Americans involved in the child welfare system.

This research may also empower and strengthen the African American communities. It may create an opportunity to understand how the dynamics of race and culture impact their involvement and experience with the child welfare system. The findings of this research may also set the pace for more policy writers to seek participation and feedback from this particular group in developing policy and even in implementing policy reform that will help reduce the occurrences of child abuse in their communities.

Summary

Child abuse is prevalent in NYC and throughout the United States and the world. Prior research mainly focused on child welfare issues through the perspectives of child protective leaders and workers. This research, however, was centered on the views of African American single mothers who were a part of the child welfare system and the policy support needed to address or reduce child abuse in their communities. I utilized the PFT for this study and incorporated BFST and CRT. The feedback given by respondents was valuable to policy development and implementation as leaders and policymakers may analyze the experiences of African American single mothers with the child welfare system to improve collaboration and policies that create positive change in reducing child abuse in their communities. Creating positive social change at all levels of the child protection system may be a catalyst for policy reform and is the goal of this research. This research serves the function of helping leaders take a qualitative approach to data

analysis and policy formation through the family's perspective as a valuable external stakeholder.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

African American families in the New York child protective system face racial and ethnic bias and must contend with complex procedures and policies that govern the child protective services (Petersen et al., 2013; Rynder, 2019). The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore, describe, and understand the African American single mothers' views of the child welfare system, along with possible solutions to improve their experiences with the child welfare system. Chapter 2 breaks down the complexity of the child welfare system and its functions in terms of its history, key stakeholders, policies, and procedures while considering prior research conducted on African Americans. This chapter provides a historical perspective on child maltreatment in the United States by presenting the types of child maltreatment and their impact on African American communities, which is relevant to understanding policymakers' approach to addressing child abuse. The chapter also focuses on African Americans' position in the child welfare system compared to other ethnic groups while exploring the possible impact of institutional bias, poverty, religion, and culture in perspectives held by the community and policymakers. Finally, the chapter discusses child welfare policies and practices in NYC and the state and federal role and contribution to its functioning and development.

Literature Search Strategy

I selected the theories and key terms through a review of past dissertations on similar qualitative studies on child abuse and maltreatment. I conducted searches using the keywords and selected PFT, CRT, and BFST in databases such as Google Scholar,

Sage Journals, Sage Knowledge, Sage Research Methods Online, Walden Library Books, Walden University Dissertation database, and EBSCO. I conducted database searches using policy terms, such as *racial disparity and disproportionality* and *policy reform and implementation*, using the keywords to collect specific information related to African Americans and child abuse and maltreatment. I also retrieved statistical data on child welfare from city, state, and federal websites such as Gateway Information, DHHS, OCFS, and ACS governmental websites that provided policies and child protective archive data. Governmental websites, including DHHS, OCFS and ACS, provided policies and child protective archive data.

Theoretical Foundation

Policy Feedback Theory

PFT developed in the 1980s and 1990s as it received attention from Skocpol's (1992) writings on the origins of social policy (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Paul Pierson's theory was also a significant influence on PFT as it focused on institutional development and its influence on political behavior. Pierson explored the interpretive effects of policies that could affect and shape interest groups' behaviors and government elites (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014).

The major PFT policy streams of inquiry entail meaningful citizenship, governance, power groups, and political agendas/problem definition (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Citizenship in PFT addresses the rights and obligations delegated by the government and citizens' responses or participation to them. Form of governance refers

to how policy may also shape the type of arrangements made in government and the actions taken. Power of groups indicates that policy can affect a group's development, functioning, and existence. Finally, political agendas and problem definitions of policy problems speak to how social problems are conceptualized and can also impact political agendas.

Citizenship

In this research, PFT was used to gather both negative and positive feedback on implemented policy, which is an essential method for analyzing policy awareness and effectiveness among African Americans. PFT is set on the foundation of assessing political involvement of civic participation and evaluating whether the policy only benefits a specific interest group (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). This theory is relevant to understanding African American single mothers' engagement and decision-making process in child protective investigations related to their children. The theory can also be used to evaluate the engagement and response to services to address their actions of committing acts of child abuse, whether the participation is voluntary, forced, or understood. The study placed value on the feedback provided by the respondents on their lived experiences, which is valuable for policy development and reforms. Policy feedback encourages civic engagement and participation in the policy process (Callahan et al., 2012; Mettler & SoRelle, 2014).

Form of Governance

A policy may influence the child welfare administration effectiveness and competence level in meeting African Americans' needs in the child welfare system. There is a need for child welfare administrators to be accountable and manage performance, expectations, and political responsiveness of the social, political, and cultural environments (Hwang, 2016). The form of governance was used to assess feedback on whether African Americans have access to resources within the child welfare system compared to other ethnic/racial groups. For instance, whether the child welfare system's policy and procedures are sensitive to African Americans' racial barriers and cultural needs. Examining the form of governance may provide feedback on whether leadership and administration within the child welfare system are competent in addressing African Americans' needs.

Power of Groups

I assessed whether the policies, laws, and procedures governing child abuse benefit certain specific interest groups. Two policy feedback benefits include examining the influence of the policy on the behaviors and attitudes of the people it affects (Campbell, 2011). It also provides an opportunity for leaders and administrators to determine the willingness of African Americans to participate in the policy implementation process. The feedback given by African Americans may be valuable data to create social change through policy development, reforms, and procedures that will reduce child abuse within their communities. Building networks and partnerships with

neighborhood leaders, businesses, and scholars can facilitate social change (Callahan et al., 2012). This research may create interest in policy leaders in developing networks with African Americans and other minority leaders to participate in policy decisions.

Political Agendas/Policy Problems

Political agendas speak to feedback around the political climate and plan around the social problem and policy needs (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Political agendas shape the context of the public view on whether the government has taken ownership of the social problems of racial discrimination and the high rates of African American single mothers in the child welfare system and the need to address it (Michener & Brower, 2019). Changes in the political climate from groups such as Black Lives Matter may shape the needs and priorities of ensuring equality for African Americans in the child welfare system (Copeland, 2015).

Critical Race Theory

CRT represents researchers' efforts to study the changes in the relationship between race as impacted by racism and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT emerged in the 1970s as researchers observed a decrease in advancements made by the civil rights movements. The prior strategies of protesting and lawsuits were not effective in creating meaningful change when the civil rights era had reached a standstill (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). New forms of racism in that era led to new theories and strategies to fight the new forms of racism that emerged. The movement brought several lawyers and activists to develop and enlighten ideas and writings on combating racism. Bell was

known as the original author of CRT, playing a significant influence on racism and ways to improve the lives of African Americans (Hughes et al., 2013). CRT has shown a revolution in how social scientists have provided perspective to racism and racial inequality issues over the three decades (Reece, 2018).

CRT was used in the study to explore the impact of race and power in describing the child welfare system and whether discrimination impacts the overrepresentation of African American children in the child welfare system. Caucasians hold the majority and control the policies and laws designed to advance their goals (Delgado & Sefancic, 2001). The tenets of CRT involve the view that racism is ordinary and results in interest convergence, social construction, and differential racialization. The unique voice of color represents experiences communicated by people of color with racism.

Racism is Ordinary

Racism occurs because of unequal distribution of resources, and Caucasians who own resources and the majority of the wealth also maintain dominance over people of color (Delgado & Sefancic, 2001). Racism experienced by most people of color is difficult to eradicate, given the role and existence of a majority (Delgado & Sefancic, 2001). Racism may be institutionalized and demonstrated in unconscious actions and behaviors through forms of bias (Tate & Page, 2018). Unconscious bias may occur in various aspects of the child welfare system.

Exploring racism is critical to addressing public policy that may reinforce racial disparity and disproportionality issues in the child welfare system. CRT may help

determine how African American children function or manage within the child welfare system, as it might help understand systemic bias when providing services for families of color within the child welfare system (Gourdine, 2019). CRT also sets out a framework for the effect of race on people of color (Gourdine, 2019).

Interest Convergence/Material Determinism

Interest convergence occurs when racism continues to exist as the interest of the majority is to hold on to power and resources and show no desire to eradicate racism. Racism meets Caucasian material elites' needs while physically addressing the working class/minority needs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As a result, the elite advancement in the material world will lead to a limited desire to eradicate racism.

African Americans, as individuals, have a long history of racial discrimination and low economic status compared to Caucasian families. The history of segregation in America has played a role in defining the location and formation of the neighborhoods and culture developed by African Americans (Brown, 2013). After slavery, African Americans continued to face racial prejudice, dehumanization, and discrimination in the south through laws intended to suppress African Americans' socioeconomic status (Sullivan et al., 2018). African Americans who lived outside of the south also faced oppression and discrimination, mainly by individuals' actions and prejudice because of government control (Sullivan et al., 2018). African American learned values have been developed through survival and continue under a political and economic system where Caucasians are the majority (Sullivan et al., 2018). African Americans have a wide range

of cultural beliefs, values, and practices grounded in Christianity, solidarity, art, and shared experiences with discrimination (Sullivan et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2011).

Essential to understanding CRT is understanding how race impacts equity and equality for African Americans' family development and interactions with different social systems. CRT is critical to understanding health disparities and solutions needed to address the public health and social justice principles required for African Americans affected by HIV testing and treatment compared to other groups (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). CRT impacts race consciousness and may be used to address racial and ethnic inequities.

Social Construction of Race

Social construction highlights the views or constructs invented by a society of race that borders on physical attributes rather than intellectual personalities and behaviors (Gillborn, 2015). Social construction has led to the stereotyping of minorities as those who serve the function of meeting the needs of the majority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Differential racialization occurs when a group's stereotypes or constructs shift to changing needs and demands, eliminating the group's traits and characteristics and uniqueness (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Additionally, microaggressions are forms of systemic racism that are both verbal or nonverbal that target people of color, such as visual microaggressions on television have continued to infuse the stereotypes and racism faced by minorities while keeping the power of the majority group (Huber & Solorzano, 2015). In this study, I examined African American single mothers' experiences and

whether they have faced any form of verbal or nonverbal discrimination with the child welfare system.

Voice of Color

Voice of color plays an essential role in CRT as minorities share a similar experience with racism and communicate their experiences and position on the issue. African Americans, Indians, Asians, and Latinos experienced a similar history of discrimination and can better communicate through their writings on issues significant about racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Bowen's Family Systems Theory

BFST mainly focuses on the interaction and behaviors of the family between the family members to identify individual traits and patterns of behaviors with transactions and interactions made with each other (Johnson & Ray, 2016). Family systems theory developed during World War II when multidisciplinary teams gained interest in studying behavior and mental illness through family interactions towards understanding the family as a system (Johnson & Ray, 2016). Family systems theory provides insight on the interactional processes on a broader level between members of the family between various levels with both family and non-family group and members that affect interactions and behaviors of individuals (Johnson & Ray, 2016). BSFT was used to explore African American single mothers as a family structure that interacts with the child welfare system.

Societal Emotional Process

BFST presented the societal emotional process, which focuses on the family interactions with organizations (Thompson et al., 2019). Bowen (1976) explained that the family is emotionally connected and reactive to each other, which leads to interdependence. Any tensions or strains within the family may lead to absorbed system anxiety, creating clinical problems such as drug/alcohol misuse and mental and medical health concerns (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, 2016). Bowen suggested that the family as a nuclear unit faces emotional strains such as marital conflict, dysfunction of a spouse, impairment of a child, and emotional distance.

BFST was aligned in the research to highlight the impact of the societal emotional process on the family interaction in work and social/economic organizations. Child welfare administrators need to be aware of the challenges and barriers families are faced with in overcoming issues related to child abuse and neglect (Thompson et al., 2019). Child welfare administrators also need to research and understand the experiences families face with the child welfare system as well as examine the challenges frontline staff face when engaging families in services (Thompson et al., 2019). Child welfare individuals need to understand the role family system in addressing the need for services for all families compared to just focusing on the child's needs or individuals only in the family (Thompson & Colvin, 2018). Exploring African American single mother' service needs may provide insight to policymakers on tailored reforms to reduce issues of racial disproportionality in child welfare system.

In this study, BFST was utilized to help set the foundation for understanding family development through interactions with organizations that can impact anxiety and isolation felt by African American single mothers. Through interaction with the child welfare system, African Americans may experience a lack of equity and equality compared to Caucasian families, influencing their emotional process with the system. Researchers and policymakers need to understand the African American family as a system affected by issues of racial discrimination that may create or heighten levels of anxiety within the community. Gathering the experiences and feedback of African Americans is valuable to developing a child welfare policy that is sensitive to understanding family as a unit, defined by their history and race. BFST was used in the framework for understanding policy awareness and linking feedback through family interactions with the child welfare system.

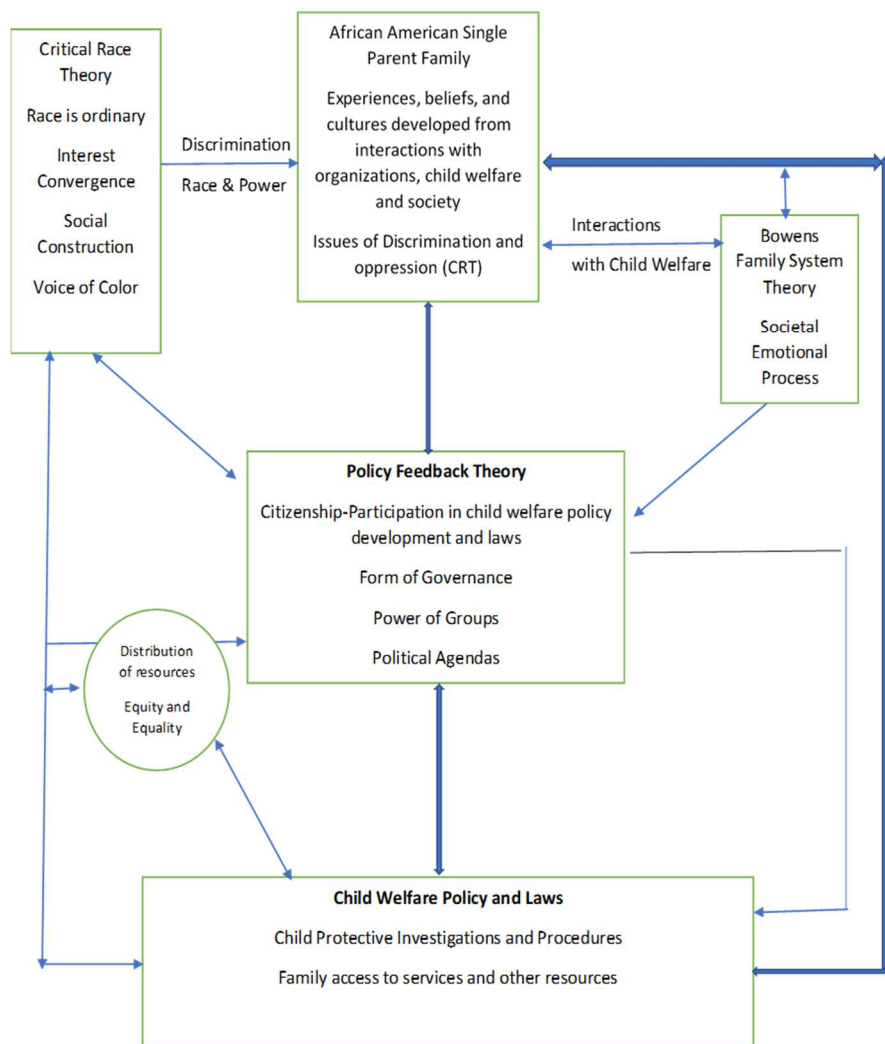
Theories' Relevance

The theories of CRT and BFST provided relevance to the public policy focus of this research. CRT and BFST were integrated into the study to show the impact and dynamics of culture, racism, and family relationships in African American single mothers' reactions to child welfare policies. Policymakers and researchers will also consider these theories' role in forming policies. BFST was also critical to understanding the impact of interactions and behaviors African American single mothers may have had with their own family and non-family groups that shape their experiences with child welfare. Researchers can also analyze whether child welfare policies have been sensitive

to African American single-parent mothers' cultural and socio-economic needs (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Relationship Between Theories



As presented in Figure 1 the conceptual framework shows PFT as holding the central foundation to the study of exploring the experiences of African American single mothers through the lens of civic participation and assessing the influence of race and the family interactions with child welfare policy. PFT sets out the foundation for researchers to examine African American single mothers' willingness to participate in the child welfare system and their confidence in the leadership and policies that affect them. PFT guided the analysis of the group's existence and whether child welfare policies have negatively or positively affected African American single mothers. PTF also set out the framework to understand from the experiences of African Americans how they view the political agendas of the child welfare system and whether there are negative or positive views of the child welfare system and its political climate. Maltby (2017) examined the criminal justice system and argued that public policy could impact African Americans' participation for lack of involvement in the political process due to realized unequal outcomes. This study utilized the feedback loop to explore African American single mothers' experiences willingness to participate in child welfare services.

PTF also allowed researchers to explore the accessibility of resources to African Americans based on political agendas and governance within the child welfare system. Allocation of child welfare resources and the values and norms created can impact African Americans' efficacy and participation in the child welfare system. PTF was used in this study to examine critical racial barriers African Americans face as a family system.

PFT creates an opportunity for researchers to interpret the data for trends and patterns that show positive and negative experiences with a policy that may affect the involvement of African American single mothers as group participation and views held in the policies that affect them. Policymakers will also be able to use PFT to create more inclusion within the system for African Americans to participate in shaping policy reforms through forums held within child welfare. I analyzed the experiences of African American single mothers by incorporating the three theories to assess for any issues of implicit bias and whether the child welfare system addressed the group's needs compared to other racial and ethnic groups within the child welfare system.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Historical Development of Child Welfare

Major collaboration for child protection started in the late 19th century (The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2017). During this period, child protection was a function of voluntary groups and organizations before being funded by the federal government (Courtney, 2013). Between 1875 and 1962, non-profit agencies developed, organized, and grew, conducting child protective services (Myers, 2006). Courts were identified as playing a role in fighting criminal acts against children, as in the case of Massachusetts in 1962, in which Magistrates used authority to remove neglected and abused children from their parents. In 1866 the courts had the legal right to intervene in cases of neglect that occurred due to lack of education, crime, and drunkenness by the parent (Myers, 2006). 1962 represented the start of government-

funded child protective services in the United States (Myers, 2006). Government-funded child welfare marked a new era in addressing the safety of children in America.

Child protection in America went through a period of structural organization, as in the case of child Mary Ellen McCormack, which led to reforms and positive changes in child protection response in the U.S. (NYSPCC, 2017). The Mary Ellen McCormack case helped make significant strides in the child abuse arena in the United States. In New York, during the period of Mary Ellen, there were no laws to protect humans from abuse; there were only laws to protect animals. Mary Ellen McCormack was a nine-year-old girl who suffered abuse from her caretakers, who beat her regularly and neglected her. Myers (2006) explained efforts through the NYC Police Department and charity organizations to help Mary, but they declined to intervene.

Eta Wheeler, a missionary who learned of Mary's abuse, brought her case to Henry Bergh and attorney Elbridge Gerry, both members of the NY Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Myers, 2006). Myers (2006) further explained that both Bergh and Gerry observed the lack of protection agencies for children, and they formed the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) (Myers, 2006). Bergh and Gerry used the legal framework of A writ of Habeas Corpus to remove Mary Allen from her caretakers. Federman (2006) described A writ of Habeas Corpus as a procedure in which a jailer explains why a prisoner is in custody to the court.

NYSPCC created a profound impact and by 1922 there were over 300 organizations devoted to child protection (Myers, 2006). Several laws prohibited children

from being employed (NYSPCC, 2017). New Child protection laws also required guardians to ensure children received adequate supervision, medical care, food, clothing, and shelter. These laws influenced by the actions of the NYSPCC also played a role in the development of the first Children's Court (NYSPCC, 2017). Myers (2006) reported that with the advent of new organizations for child protection, juvenile courts were established, which first developed in Chicago in 1899. In 1919 most states in the United States had a Juvenile Court.

The twentieth century saw a change in child protection as there was consensus to move it to a central function and role of government and social service (Myers, 2008). Non-governmental agencies such as the NYSPCC and Children's Aid Society face problems in finding placements for children (Courtney, 2013). Children were transported on trains from NYC to towns and rural areas where families would take them in. Courtney further expressed that minorities experienced separation from their culture and families because of being placed in foster care. In 1909 the White House held the first efforts to address placement services of children known as the First White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children (Courtney, 2013). The meeting resulted in the consensus to place children with their families rather than institutions, and recommendations also helped prevent the removal of children from their homes (Courtney, 2013). The establishment of the Children's Bureau 1912 resulted from recommendations of the conference with a mandate to implement federal goals and objectives regarding child welfare initiatives. Myers (2006) explained that the federal

government's role expanded with the Sheppard Tower Act, which provided funding to mothers with babies between 1921-1929. Myers further stated that in 1935, the passing of the Social Security Act provided funding to dependent children.

The foreshadowing of a government takeover of child welfare in 1956 came from a study conducted on the child welfare system by Vincent De Francis, a director of the Children Division of Humane Association. The study found that only 84 nongovernmental organizations were involved in child protection, initially totaling 300 in 1922. Most of the state's states' child welfare agencies were under governmental control in the 1950s. Courtney (2013) stated that the Social Security Act provided funding to help states implement preventive and protective services. Courtney also reported that the Social Security Act also provided funding for foster care for children under its Child

Welfare Services Program (Title V). The Social Security Act also directed the Children's Bureau to work with states in strengthening child protection services and policies. Myers (2006) highlighted that although there was an improvement in child protection, some states provided no 24-hour protection for children, such as California in 1965, which did not have any county system to protect children.

In the 1960s, medical professionals had a limited interest in child abuse. However, Myers (2006) pointed to the work of John Caffey, a pediatric radiologist who brought attention to child abuse by conducting a study of children with fractures and hematomas. Caffey's work stirred up the interest of other physicians in studying child abuse, as seen in the writings of Henry Kempe. He published the article "The Battered

Children Syndrome,” which brought national attention to the topic and issues of child abuse (Myers, 2006). The work of Kempe and Caffey also led to reform changes to Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), which stipulated the requirement for doctors to report abuse to the police or child welfare.

In 1974 CAPTA was created and was symbolic of the federal government’s commitment towards working with states to address child protection (Courtney, 2013). In 1975 Block Grants were implemented under the Social Security Act to help states with funding to promote child protection, family preservation, and child preventive services (Courtney, 2013). In 1975 changes in child protection led to the establishment of the National Clearing House on Child Abuse and Neglect. In 1978 CAPTA was reformed with the US Advisory Board on Abuse and Neglect (U.S. DHHS, 2018). Myers (2006) reported the changes in child welfare from 1974–2000 to be significant as in 1974, there were 60,000 reports of child abuse, and by the year 2000, there were over three million reports of abuse in the U.S.

Causes of Child Abuse

The New York laws on child abuse are under the Social Service Law (Section 412) and Family Court Act (Section 1012). ACS operates under the state agency OCFS. Child abuse is the failure of a parent or guardian that results in the harms a child physically, emotionally, or sexually (ACS, 2020). Physical abuse as the infliction of serious injury to a child by a parent other than accidental means that may have resulted from shaking, burning, kicking, or punching a child (ACS, 2020). Sex abuse, according

to ACS, may result in a parent or caretaker performing acts of rape, genital intercourse, sodomy, or exposing the child to any sexual activities.

The National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention (2020), a funded agency by the DHHS, reported several significant causes of child abuse in the United States. The NCERP cited reasons for abuse in children due to several factors such as emotional and health problems, low income and single-parent family stressors, domestic violence, substance abuse, unrelated child caregivers, lack of child education, and parent history of maltreatment. The American Psychological Association (2018) explained that parent, child, environment, and family risk factors such as caregiver's mental health, poverty, and lack of knowledge on child development influence the occurrence of child abuse. Income inequality has been a significant issue resulting in family involvement with the child protective system. Eckenrode et al. (2014) studied data on the national and county level and observed a correlation between child maltreatment rates and income inequality. The study's goal was to present and analyze family income and describe how it is connected to child abuse and maltreatment using variables of demographics, economy, and poverty.

Several risk factors continue to contribute to the occurrence of child abuse, and maltreatment in the United States. DHHS (2016) identified risk factors that create a likelihood of child maltreatment resulting from parental drug/alcohol misuse, financial problems, and inadequate housing. Through an analysis of child maltreatment data from 2014 - 2016, 5.5 % of parents experienced financial difficulties, and 10 % of reported

having inadequate housing (U.S. DHHS, 2016). In 2016 11.5% of maltreated children in the United States had parents who abused alcohol, while 28.5% used illegal drugs. (U.S. DHHS, 2016).

Child Maltreatment

Many government subsidiary agencies provide national data on child maltreatment from each state. Major child data reporting agencies include the DHHS Children's Bureau and Child Welfare Gateway Information. Rebbe (2017) cited data from DHHS stated that child maltreatment represents 75% of all reported types of child abuse in the United States. Child neglect and abuse are used synonymously in some states. However, child neglect focuses on the failure of a parent or guardian to provide the minimum degree of care in meeting the child's needs (ACS, 2020). Rebbe (2017) differentiated between abuse and neglect. Rebbe reported that neglect focuses on the failures of a parent to provide for a child compared to sex and physical abuse, which are acts or behaviors to harm a child. Rebbe highlighted that the definition of child neglect is different from state to state and varies by cultural differences. DHHS (2019) defines neglect and abuse as a parent's failure or act that harms a child physically, emotionally, sexually, or by death.

NYC has a diverse population and understanding racial disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system requires observation of the population distribution. The U.S. Census Bureau (2018) reported NYC to have a total population of 8,622,698, of which 42% are Caucasian, 29% Hispanic Latino, and 25% are African Americans. In the

borough of Brooklyn, African Americans make up 33% and Caucasians at 43% (The US Census Bureau, 2018). Also, in the Bronx, African Americans make up 33%, while Caucasians make up 21%. In Staten Island, 74% of the population is Caucasian, while 10% are African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

In New York, 95 % of all reported maltreatment occurs due to neglect, while physical abuse accounts for 9.6% and sexual abuse accounts for 3% of all cases investigated by child protection (U.S. DHHS, 2018). Of the five boroughs in NYC, Brooklyn and the Bronx have the highest indication rate (48%) of child abuse and neglect, while Staten Island has the lowest indication rate at 35% (ACS, 2017).

Physical Abuse. DHHS (2016) national statistics on child maltreatment showed that 74584 cases where children were victims of child physical abuse, which accounted for 11.1% of the reported child protective cases in the U.S. Ohio had the highest number of children physically abused, with a total of 10, 733 of 23,635 reports received in 2016. South Carolina had 9165 child physical abuse cases of 17331 child abuse reports, and Michigan 8779 of 37293 with the highest rates compared to the other states. New York had a total of 6246 of its 65123 reports of child maltreatment received in 2016 (DHHS, 2016). There were approximately 1700 child fatalities in 2016, which was the highest occurrence among Caucasian children, with 634 deaths of a population of 30 million. African American child fatalities were at a total of 401 of a population of 8 million children.

There have been many risk factors that have resulted in the physical abuse of children. Fréchette et al. (2015) conducted a study to examine the connection between spanking at an early age in childhood and the risk of child physical abuse in Canada. The study utilized a sample of 370 university students with questions that explored discipline methods experienced at age 10. The study used the variables of spanking, parental support, psychological aggression, impulsiveness, and `positive discipline. The study found out that respondents who reported spanking were highly likely to also experience abusive behaviors by their caregivers. The study also revealed that the impulsive actions of the parents from intimate partner violence resulted in the use of corporal punishment in the home. (Fréchette et al., 2015). Mothers' use of physical discipline may result from negative experiences.

Lee and Chen (2017) conducted a study on the impact of community violence and personal victimization experienced by caregivers and the effect these experiences have on parenting and support. Lee and Chen postulated that harsh parenting is likely to result in delinquent behaviors among children. Lee and Chen used a sample of 2840 respondents; 47% consisted of African American single mothers representing the highest, Caucasians 22%, and others at 29 %. The study revealed that mothers who witnessed physical violence in their communities were more likely to report the use of both psychological and physical aggression with their children. Lee and Chen also said that mothers who showed depressive symptoms also used harsh parenting methods on their children. Lee and Chen stated that paternal support reduced the occurrences of child maltreatment

among mothers. Guterman et al. (2018) support the idea of paternal support for reducing child abuse and neglect. Guterman et al. conducted a pilot study visitation program which consisted of two groups for families. The first group comprised 12 families enrolled in a dad matter intervention group, and the other 12 families in the second group received the standard visitation program services. An evidence-based model was used to support and supervise visits of fathers in the home. The study found that mothers who participated in the program reported decreased stress and less likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

Child Sex Abuse. Child sexual abuse continues to be a significant problem in the United States, representing 6.6 % of the total abuse faced by children (DHHS, 2016). Seth and Srivastava (2017) described child sex abuse as a prevalent worldwide criminal act that requires an evidence-based approach of a multidisciplinary team to address and investigate the trauma faced by children. Hassan et al. (2015) cited data from WHO, which showed that 14% of girls in the world experience sexual abuse compared to boys, with a total of 7%.

Corporal Punishment and Religion. Religion has played a significant role in shaping parents' perspectives and beliefs around child-rearing. For many centuries, Christianity has guided parents' authority as a disciplinarian and authoritarian in the home. The use of corporal punishment has been rooted in Christian beliefs and Judaism and has its place in American statutes and culture (Blum, 2016). 49 states supported physical discipline once parents use it to promote their children's wellbeing (Blum, 2016). 80% of Christians believe in spanking their children compared to 65% non-

Christians. Blum also showed that 82% of African Americans reported using spanking compared to 72% of Caucasians who believe in its use (Blum, 2016). 80% of Republicans support spanking in America, while only 65% of Democrats believe in spanking their children (Blum, 2016). The data provided by Blum showed the perspective held based on political affiliation, race, and religion. The data showed that most African Americans use corporal punishment in the southern states. The northeast, which includes NYC, have an average rate of 65 % of persons who believe in spanking (Blum, 2016). NYC like southern states had the influence of religion and political affiliation in shaping parents' views on type of discipline used with their children.

Protestantism shaped the beliefs of Americans on the use of corporal punishment (Hoffman et al., 2017). Parents viewed spanking as a form of discipline from the Bible which has absolute authority over their actions (Hoffman et al., 2017). Parents face inert convictions and feel they are not in God's will when they do not follow the principles of God's will in disciplining their children (Hoffman et al. (2017). Hoffman et al., (2017) conducted a study to gather Americans' attitudes towards corporal punishment by analyzing a cross-section of data from 1986-2014 that covered social issues related to corporal discipline. The study revealed that although there was a move away from conservative values regarding spanking, Protestants still held on to it as a primary form for disciplining their children.

African Americans and Neglect

There have been many studies on the impact of child neglect among African

American communities in the United States. Duprey et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study of 1354 youths ages 4–18. The sample was from urban and suburban areas and comprised two groups (maltreated and non-maltreated children). Most African American children in the neglected group represented 55% of the sample, while Caucasians 25% and Hispanics 22%. 60% African Americans represent the non-maltreated group while 23% Caucasians and 40% Hispanics. Duprey et al. reported that child neglect is the most prevalent in the United States and is mainly a result of substance abuse. The study found out that children who experience child abuse at age four to adolescence internalize the abuse and resort to the misuse of illegal substances. The study also showed a positive correlation between the neighborhoods they lived in and their continued misuse of controlled or illicit substances (Duprey et al., (2017)).

Child maltreatment continues to be a significant problem that can result from one or more combinations of risk factors that cause severe trauma or physical harm in children and the continued cycle of abuse. Risk factors such as socio-economic, parent/child behaviors, and maternal history will likely impact the reoccurrence of abuse and neglect (Espinosa et al., 2017). Socioeconomic risk factors include single-parent households, lack of education, and parental support as contributing to child abuse (Espinosa et al., 2017). Parental behaviors are associated with misuse of substances and untreated mental health, while child behaviors include aggression and defiance (Espinosa et al., 2017). Maternal caregivers transfer the history of child abuse, continuing the cycle of child maltreatment in their parenting techniques (Espinosa et al., 2017). Maternal

history focuses on the impact of childhood abuse and trauma transferred into the parenting techniques to continue the occurrence of maltreatment.

Espinosa et al. (2017) used an ecological perspective to establish a correlation between Latino and African American single mothers related to child abuse. Espinoza et al. (2017) used a cross-sectional study with a sample of 170 mothers, of which 78% were African Americans and 22% Hispanic Latino. The study aimed at exploring correlations between child-rearing and the impact of substance abuse and the mental health concerns of mothers who live in low-income communities. The study utilized a Child Abuse Potential Inventory, a scale that uses six factors: stress, rigidity, unhappiness, problems with a child, family, and others. The research revealed a correlation between mothers' socio-economic status and Child Abuse Potential Inventory scores. Espinoza et al. (2017) reported that the younger the maternal mother is and the higher the exposure to trauma, the likelihood of child abuse. The African single-family household was explored in this study as data was gathered to assess the stresses faced by mothers within the structure.

The complexity of child neglect and understanding its implications and impact on minorities based on socio-economic settings has been an important topic of interest to many researchers. Mulder et al. (2018) shared the importance of understanding the dynamics and risk factors of child neglect with the goal for researchers and policymakers to build on the research knowledge and awareness of child neglect. Mulder et al. attributed risk factors to the occurrence of issues to meeting children's needs for supervision, food, education, and medical care. Policymakers may further explore risk

factors faced by African American single mothers to meet the needs of the family as a unit.

African Americans and Child Sex Abuse. African American children experience high rates of sex abuse and continue to deal with the challenges in managing the continued trauma faced in their communities. Ruiz (2016) reported that the treatment of children over the years who have experienced sexual abuse has increased. Ruiz conducted a study using archival data of 176 children receiving therapy to address sex abuse and discovered that African Americans and Latino children showed more symptoms and prolonged traumatic effects than Caucasian children. The study also showed that older children showed more anxiety, depression, anger, and post-traumatic stress. Ruiz recommended a systematic approach to understand the differences experienced in trauma among the various cultural groups when addressing sex abuse during therapy.

Hassan et al. (2015) conducted a similar study to review data of 95 children who experienced sexual assault between the ages of 6–14 and revealed child sex abuse as underreported. Hassan et al. examined gender differences related to sex abuse and ethnicity and stated that most girls (74% of the sample) sought treatment for sexual abuse. Hassan et al. further noted that these differences confirmed other studies that show African American children have a high rate of sex abuse compared to other racial or ethnic groups. Hassan et al. also showed that someone familiar to the children was the one that committed the sexual assault.

Religion and Corporal Punishment Among African Americans. Christianity played a significant role in African Americans' use of corporal punishment. The Bible serves as the main guidebook that encourages parents to use corporal punishment methods to discipline children (Hoffman et al., 2017). 79% of African Americans in the United States are Christians (The Pew Research Center, 2019). Researchers over the years investigated the impact of religion and its possible effect on the occurrence of child abuse. Chaney et al. (2015) conducted a study on African American megachurches' attitudes towards the use of corporal punishment. The study used the method of analyzing the comments and reactions of viewers to controversy and news surrounding African American Mega preacher Creflo Dollar choking his daughter as a form of discipline and the charges brought against him. The study emphasized the viewpoint held by churches and the impact of physical abuse. Chaney et al. highlighted key Bible scriptures supporting the use of corporal punishment, such as Proverbs 23:13, which states, "*Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he should not die.*" Most persons condemned Creflo Dollars' actions as abusive. However, some bloggers supported the use of corporal punishment by citing scripture verse that advocates for parents to use the rod as a form of discipline Chaney et al., 2015). In the United States, although there have been several movements against spanking, there continue to be 19 states that allow the use of corporal punishment in schools (Perrin et al., 2017). A majority of parental attitudes remain the same in favor of using spanking as a discipline method and conservative protestant Christians are more likely to use corporal

punishment as they feel mandated by the Bible to use spanking methods (Perrin et al., 2017).

Physical discipline remains the main parenting style used by African American mothers to address the parenting and disciplining of children. Taylor et al. (2011) found a correlation among African American single mothers between its use and the perceptiveness of corporal punishment. Taylor et al.'s study revealed that African American single mothers used corporal punishment out of love due to stress. African American parents face the challenges of balancing normative beliefs sustained and shaped from religious viewpoints and meeting the requirements of child welfare law of not committing acts of child abuse. The excessive use of corporal punishment is an essential discussion among researchers as cases regarding corporal punishment continue to be brought before family courts to determine whether physical discipline leads to child abuse.

African Americans and Racial Disparity and Disproportionality

Racial disproportionality and disparity have been significant issues affecting African American families. There are large numbers of African American children involved in the child welfare system compared to Caucasian children in the US. African American children are over-represented and exit the welfare system at a slower rate when compared to Caucasian children (Ononde et al., 2014 & Rynders, 2019). African American children enter the foster care system at higher rates when compared to other racial groups and have difficulty achieving permanency as there are challenges in finding

homes for them (DHHS, 2016). Racial disproportionality in child welfare occurs when a racial or ethnic group is over-represented compared to its percentage in the total population (U.S. DHHS, 2016).

Racial disparity focuses on the observed unequal outcomes of one racial group compared with others (U.S. DHHS., 2016). Racial disproportionality is defined as occurring when a described population is out of proportion to a specific reference population. The racial disparity occurs when there is a lack of equity between minority and non-minority children in the child welfare system (Boyd 2014, Hill, 2008). Ononde et al. (2014) expressed the concern of racial disproportionality with children and reported that African American males are over-represented in the foster care system with a rate of 10.73 (per 1000). Adolescent African American males between the ages of 13–17 represent the largest group in foster care and are in congregate facilities as they face troubling experiences in care. Ononde et al. further reported that African American males are less likely to exit the foster care system and usually age out of foster care.

Font et al. (2012) examined racial disproportionality and disparity regarding child protective specialists' decision-making on abuse cases. There is a tendency for African American caseworkers to substantiate cases of abuse when dealing with African American families in comparison to families (Font et al.,2012) African American children are at a higher rate of being labeled by African American caseworkers, who also judge these families more harshly than Caucasian caseworkers (Font et al.,2012). CPS decisions are influenced by geographic location, differences in services, and income

distribution (Font et al.,2012). Cultural competence training for CPS and the employment of more minorities will address racial disparity in the child welfare system (Font et al.,2012).

Klein and Merritt (2014) captured the differences in racial groups involved in child welfare and conducted a study on neighborhood ethnic and racial diversity and examined the role of Social Disorganization Theory. Social Disorganization Theory is the situation in which it is difficult for social controls to address social problems in some neighborhoods that are disorganized and plagued with a host of social issues (Klein and Merritt, 2014). The shared goals and collective participation are difficult to achieve in these neighborhoods as there is mistrust and limited support through services for these families (Klein and Merritt, 2014).

Klien and Merritt conducted a crossectional study on child maltreatment in Los Angeles, California, examining the special relationship between ethnic/racial diversity of African American, Hispanics, and Caucasian neighborhoods. The study showed that housing stress was a significant predictor for child maltreatment rates among African American families compared to other racial groups. Klien and Merritt also reported that families' racial, ethnic, and demographic location are affected by maltreatment rates. Exploring geographic locations and accessibility to resources may provide insight to researchers on factors that may impact African Americans involvement in child welfare system.

Boyd (2014) examined the causes of racial disparity and disproportionality and identified several contributing factors such as poverty, bias, agency factors, neighborhood risk, and parent/family factors. Discrimination occurs when child welfare staff develop stereotypes of African Americans from past case experiences, impacting their decisionmaking. Poverty exposes African American children to higher risk factors and social problems (Font et al, (2012). As a result, they become involved in the child welfare system, as higher maltreatment rates occur in neighborhoods that experience high poverty levels (Boyd, 2014). Systemic factors of discrimination within the child welfare organization may lead to the continued disproportion of African American children as issues such as institutional racism, poor organizational culture, and limited available services continue to exist.

Congressional findings in 2010 showed that in 2008, African Americans, Native Indians, and Alaskan native children represented the highest rate of abuse and maltreatment in the U.S. (Govinfo.gov, 2020). Maguire-Jack et al. (2018) studied racial disparity in child maltreatment in Franklyn County, Ohio, assessing accessibility to services. 1053 parents selected for the survey received incentives from the Women, Infant, and Children program. The study compared African American and Caucasian families living close to services. The study revealed that African American families lived closer to poverty and services to address mental health and substance abuse than Caucasian families. Maguire-Jack, Cao, and Yoon reported that African American

families close to areas of poverty and substance abuse services still experienced higher rates of child physical abuse and neglect.

Maloney et al. (2017) conducted a similar study in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, in which there was an analysis of all the birth records in that county from the period August 2008 to 2010. The study aimed at finding out whether there was any child listed in maltreatment reports during that period. The study revealed that of the 27,527 births in that period, 21.1% were African American, and 78.9% were Caucasian. The study, however, did not identify how many African American and Caucasian children were a subject of a child abuse investigation. African American children had a higher rate of maltreatment as one out of five children were reported to be maltreated before the age of four, 2.9 times higher than Caucasian families (Maloney et al., 2017). African American children were three times more likely to be placed in foster care and support for single-parent African American women through preventive services will reduce maltreatment rates among the group (Maloney et al., 2017).

Over the years, the reforms and changes in child protection impacted race, ethnicity, and culture. In the 19th century, there was a concern that minority children received a difference in treatment compared to other races (Courtney, 2013). The overrepresentation of minorities in the child welfare system was known to the courts., especially the concerns of the removal of Indian children from their communities, heritage, and culture (Courtney, 2013). The Indian Child Welfare Act was established in

1978 to grant access to tribal courts for Indians and allow placement for children in Indian communities.

The overrepresentation of African American children and other minority groups led to the Multi-ethnic Placement Act of 1994 and the Interethnic Placement Act of 1996. The Multiethnic and Interethnic Placement Acts led to the stipulation by the court on child welfare agencies in placing children of color as they stayed longer in foster care (Courtney, 2013). This approach allowed children of color to find placement through a colorblind placement approach rather than matching children based on their race and ethnicity (Courtney, 2013). However, advocates against this procedure argued the possibility of harm to children by placements that do not match their race, culture, or ethnic background (Courtney, 2013). The Placement Acts implemented in 994 and 1996 were aimed at reducing overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system.

Reducing Racial Disparity and Disproportionality

Policy reforms are needed to promote family preservation for African American children faced with racial disparity disproportionality and inequality. Taking steps to improve policies for African Americans would provide a social advantage for these children within the child welfare system (Anyon, 2011). Permanency challenges occurred for African American as child welfare agencies had difficulty in locating families that matched the children placed in need of placement (Anyon, 2011). Policies should encourage colorblind placement decisions of African American children with any ethnic

or racial group, which will increase more available placement resources for African American children (Anyon, 2011). Timelines were recommended for terminating parents' rights and creating more incentives for adoptive parents with more access to social capital to reduce African Americans involved in the foster care system (Anyon, 2011). In further addressing the issues of African Americans involved in foster care, Anyon further recommended child placement policies to facilitate a cultural continuity for African American children through cultural competency training and race matching. Anyon stated that preservation policies are needed for African American families as they are at a higher risk of being involved in child welfare and lack resources to protect their children. Anyon believed that policies for family preservation should be targeted and accessible to families.

Many researchers have highlighted the role of culture in child welfare. Klien and Merritt (2014) explained the need to address ethnic and racial issues in child welfare through services specifically responsive to culture. Klien and Merritt stated the need for child welfare programs to get families to feel comfortable participating in the services offered. Klien and Merritt also pointed out that although federal programs require evidence-based programs, they lack the specific policies and procedures to address the needs of an ethnic or racial group. There are, however, guidelines laid out by the federal government that protects children of Native American tribes through a policy called the Indian and Child Welfare Act signed in 1978. Indian and Child Welfare Act gave Indian

tribes jurisdiction and a voice in the placement proceedings regarding native children (US Department of Interior, 2021).

Many researchers and policymakers have recommended achieving racial equity within the child welfare system for African American children. Ononde et al. (2014) advocated for an aggressive approach to the racial disparity of African American males in the child welfare system by recommending a system-wide commitment towards a mission and vision-driven to ensure racial equity throughout child welfare operations and outcomes. Ononde et al. further suggested that child welfare agencies should develop strong partnerships with community organizations, schools, and advocates, while also enhancing accountability by gathering the input and aspirations of African American youth.

ACS History and Reforms

The history of Child Welfare in NYC has taken several reforms after child welfare. NYC Mayor John Lindsay took control of child welfare in 1969 by placing it under the management of the Human Resource Administration department of the city. Mayor Lindsay formed the Human Resource Administration (HRA.) under Executive Order No. 28. The department implemented social services for NYC (HRA, 2019). Child welfare reform transitioned in NYC. with the passage of the Child Protective Services Act of 1973 and Child Welfare Act of 1979, which were legislative changes in New York that directed service planning, preventive, and protective services for the state. Albstein (1977) explained that the Child Protective Services Act enforced quick responses to child

abuse reports and changed the tone of child protection from removing children to focusing on child abuse prevention (Albstein,1977).

Mayor David Dinkins led the child welfare agency under HRA. Mayor Dinkins provided a mayor's report and reforms on foster care children in NYC in 1993. The Dinkins Mayor's report stated that there were 17000 children in foster care in 1986, and by 1990, the number of children increased to 40,000 (ACS., 2020). The Dinkins Mayor report also showed that 72% of the children in foster care were African American compared to 3.4% of the children who are Caucasian (ACS, 2020). Under Mayor Dinkins, reforms to child protection included the placement of children closer to their homes, increasing child welfare services through public-private partnerships, and developing field offices for workers to respond and establish relationships in the communities they serve (ACS, 2020).

The child protective agency under HRA was known as the Bureau of Child Welfare and later changed to Special Services for Children. Mayor Edward Koch in 1980 turned the agency to the Child Welfare Administration, and the agency transitioned to be the first standalone in 1996 under Mayor Rudy Giuliani after the death of child Elisa Izquierdo by abuse of her mother, as the agency was under scrutiny for mismanagement. Under Mayor Giuliani, the new child welfare agency was called the Administration for Children Services (ACS).

The 1990s in ACS focused on reforms with the development of collaborations with the New York Police Department in 1998 in the form of Instant Response Teams to

respond to severe abuse and fatality cases with child protective workers (ACS, 2020). In the 2000s, ACS developed teams to address mental health, domestic violence, and substance abuse, a significant problem affecting NYC communities. ACS discussed further services for the City by awarding over 800 million in contracts to agencies to provide preventive, homemaking, and foster care services (ACS, 2020). In 2006 ACS developed an evaluation system called Childstat, a replica of Compstat used by NYPD. The agency used Childstat as a forum in which leaders conducted a weekly assessment of data and trends to improve child protection practices of the agency (ACS, 2020).

The tragic death of seven-year-old child Nixzmary Brown in 2005 while being monitored by ACS created a significant challenge for the agency. Niizmary's death led to a public outcry against ACS and was a catalyst for influencing organizational change. Santos (2006) stated that the incident with Nixzmary resulted from the failure of the ACS to act to prevent the child's death. Mayor Michael Bloomberg formed an Interagency Task Force on Child Welfare and Safety to investigate and report the collaboration between the agencies to address child abuse and neglect in the city.

In 2006, the agency developed reforms to address the concerns faced by minorities and challenges faced by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning community (LBGTQ). The agency formed the Racial Equity and Cultural Competence Committee with the primary goal of highlighting the awareness of the needs and the role racism and discrimination play with minorities and the LGBTQ groups (ACS, 2020)

In 2007, ACS established improved outcomes for children to strengthen families and relationships with contracted foster care and preventive agencies. ACS rewarded agencies that developed positive results for children, and ACS further created an effective monitoring system for agencies (ACS, 2020). ACS, in 2008, established community partnership efforts with seven neighborhoods to provide resources and support for families in their communities (ACS, 2020). In 2010 ACS was responsible for the City's juvenile justice system and developed a workforce training institute in 2015 to provide ongoing training for all staff (ACS, 2020).

New York Law on Child Abuse

Social Service Law

The mandate to protect children in New York was established and implemented through social service, family, and criminal laws. Article 6 of the Social Service Law stipulates definitions related to child maltreatment and the roles of child protective agencies in New York. Section 403-408 of the Consolidated Laws of New York sets out the establishment and powers of the child protective agency and its role and function in providing child protective services and annual reports and plans regarding foster care and preventive services for children in the state. Section 397 of the Consolidated Laws of New York mandates child protective workers to investigate reports of child maltreatment with the specific goal to protect and prevent harm to children while providing stability of family life. Section 398 -400 of the Law additionally gives the agency's Commissioner the power to place children in foster care. The Consolidated Laws of New York also

cover all children, including handicapped, mentally disabled, delinquent, and children who need supervision (New York State Senate, 2020).

Family Court Responsibility

The New York State Law Article 1-10 establishes the foundation and role of the Family court in hearing and making decisions on the welfare of children in the state. The Family Court makes decisions on child protective proceedings, including requesting removals, supervising a parent's home, and intervening on matters concerning custody. The court has the task of hearing matters and issues related to destitute and delinquent children. Article 1 Part 5 of the New York State Law showed the general powers of family court ability to grant orders, including removing children, ordering services, and issuing protection orders, warrants, and arrest on cases (New York State Senate, n.d.).

Penal Law of New York

The Penal Law addresses child maltreatment as a result of abandonment, physical and sexual abuse, and any acts that endanger the welfare of a child. Title O, Section 260 of the Penal Law, addresses arrestable offenses to children, which are classified felonies or misdemeanors that pertain to child abandonment or any acts that endanger the welfare of a child. Criminal acts of sex abuse against children are arrestable as felonies under section 263 of the Penal Law. Title H of the Penal Law entails offenses against others, including physical assault and sex offenses that also address arrest in child welfare related to the maltreatment of children (NY Courts.gov, 2019).

Child Abuse Reporting and Monitoring

The State Central Registrar (SCR) receives all child abuse reports in New York through its hotline. The (SCR) of OCFS and the calls received are sent to the local CPS in NYC or surrounding counties within the state (N.Y. OCFS, 2020). The Child Protective Services Act of 1973 mandates child protective services specialists (CPS) to investigate child abuse and neglect reports. CPS must investigate all SCR reports of children under 18 years and provide the family with services (N.Y. OCFS, 2020). The SCR reports received by ACS have 60 days to investigate whether there is a preponderance of evidence of child maltreatment (Indicated) or unfounded, meaning no evidence of abuse (ACS, 2021). In 2021 New York State implemented new law to change its standard of evidence for making a case determination to a ‘preponderance of evidence’ with the goal to reduce the number of African Americans in child welfare system (N.Y. OCFS). The preponderance of evidence involved a higher legal standard than previous used ‘credible evidence’ and required case workers to gather more evidence when conducting investigations (N.Y. OCFS, 2021). The new standard of evidence introduced by the state may provide opportunities for researchers to further explore its effectiveness in reducing racial disparity and disproportionality.

The role of CPS is vital to carrying out federal, state, and city mandates and laws related to child protective reports. CPS has the task of making announced and unannounced visits to homes and schools, along with speaking to caretakers, children, health providers, and teachers on each case. Child protective investigation also includes

checking homes for adequate food sleeping arrangements and referring families for services (ACS, 2019).

Funding to Reduce Child Abuse in NYC

ACS annual 2018 report revealed a 3 billion dollars budget of 42 % of its revenue came from federal funding, while 30% came from the City, and 26% came from the state funds. ACS allocates most of its budget towards childcare, preventive, adoption, foster care, and protective services.

Child Welfare Agencies

DHHS is a federal agency developed to promote effective services in health and human services throughout the United States. (U.S. DHHS, 2016). The Administration of Children and Families is a division of DHHS responsible for promoting the wellbeing of families socially and economically (U.S. DHHS, 2016). The Administration of Children and Families aims to empower and support families and communities while creating partnerships with states and localities to develop solutions (U.S. DHHS, 2016). OCFS operates under the guidance of ACF. OCFS is responsible for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children throughout the state through mandated child abuse reporting/monitoring, foster, adoption, protective, and preventive services. OCFS provides child welfare support through partnerships with states and local governments in promoting the safety and wellbeing of children throughout the U.S. ACS operates under the guidance of OCFS. It has a mission to ensure the safety of children and families

within the five boroughs of NYC through services in education, early care, preventive, and foster care services.

Federal Funding for Child Maltreatment

CAPTA and Social Security Act

Although having varying adopting child protective policies, child protection agencies utilize the statutes of CAPTA. CAPTA was signed into Law in 1974 and represented major statutes and funding for child protection practices and procedures throughout the United States (U.S. DHHS, 2018). Since the CAPTA, several reforms have occurred throughout the years. A Secretary is appointed under the DHHS to provide oversight and support to all state and local agencies throughout the United States with technical assistance, dissemination of information, research, program evaluation, and grant funding. An advisory board under the CAPTA Act advised Congress on recommendations on child abuse and maltreatment concerns throughout the United States. The CAPTA federal grants criteria for supporting families require agencies to use research-based practices and promote public education on the role and responsibility of the child protection system in addressing reports of abuse and neglect. CAPTA law ensures that community-based programs grants meet the goal of developing shared leadership and solution-based strategies with parents.

CAPTA required local program grants for families to include services to improve parent leadership, education, respite, early childhood, counseling, and job readiness. The Law also funds and supports literacy and skill training programs and community and

social services referrals. The Social Security Act Title IV-E (42 U.S.C. §§ 671-679b) also presents legislation in which federal funds assist States and local governments in addressing maintenance and administrative cost as it directly relates to foster care (OFCS, 2020)

Federal funding for child welfare agencies has been through matching funds through the Title IV-E and IV-B of the Social Security Act. The grant covers areas of child abuse prevention and permanency services for children (U.S. DHHS, 2018).

Title IV-B Funding (Child Abuse Prevention/Preservation)

Title B funding has mainly addressed grants to states through agencies that adopt child abuse prevention, family preservation, and adoption programs. The funding goal is to ensure children are safe and raised in loving homes (US. DHHS, 2018). Haskin et al. (2015) explained that states receive over \$650 million each year, allowing for flexibility to pay for services to prevent child abuse that may have resulted from substance abuse, family violence, and mental health concerns.

Title IV-E Funding (Foster Care)

Title IV-E federal funding has assisted states in addressing needs related to foster care, adoption, and guardian assistance. Title IV-E funding covers areas of administrative cost for foster care programs, training, and recruitment of foster care staff and covers the regular cost to care for adopted and foster care children in homes. Zlotnik and Pryce (2013) highlighted the importance of Title IV-E funding as significant support to the training and recruitment of social workers who assist with foster care programs.

Summary

The theoretical framework of the research explored the significance for policymakers to encourage research and feedback from minorities such as African Americans while strategically adopting culturally sensitive approaches. PFT allows policymakers to promote the input and participation of African Americans in the child welfare research and policy formation process (Mettler & SoRelle 2014). Policymakers can capitalize on the theoretical foundation of the family system, policy feedback, and critical race theories as a guide to the formation of policies. Policies developed will be geared towards specific groups in addressing systemic bias, encouraging feedback while allowing fair access to services throughout the child welfare system to all ethnic and racial groups. Chapter 2 also presented the structural dynamics and historical development of the child welfare system throughout the US, specifically NYC.

After many reforms, child protection moved from a private endeavor to that of federal, state, and City responsibility. The Federal government provided most of the funding for child protection. The central child protection policies are governed and controlled by the CAPTA laws, states, and city agencies. The local states have developed their bylaws and procedures with the federal child welfare mandates. Funding is reciprocal to agencies meeting the national guidelines and monitoring requirements.

Federal, state, and city laws govern NYC child protection. The role of the family court, penal, and social service laws directly impact child protection protocols and procedures that directly affect parents and guardians involved in child protective cases.

The study explored parents' experiences regarding awareness, knowledge, and education on child protection procedures and laws that affect them. Exploring parents' perception of the child welfare laws was an essential factor to identifying whether parental education on child abuse is needed.

The data on child protection within the United States showed the ever-growing problems African American families face on issues of disproportionality and disparity. It is evident that African Americans, although a minority, have the highest number of involvements in the child welfare system regarding foster care and child protective cases compared to Caucasian families. African American communities have been plagued with accessibility to resources and services to address child abuse throughout history. Exploring this issue is vital as there are no federal or state laws specific to addressing the concerns faced with child abuse within African American families.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This qualitative research explored and described the experiences of African American single mothers who were faced with the complex procedures and policies that govern the investigation of child abuse cases in NYC. The chapter also provides a detailed outline of the research's population and sample selection and why the sample size of 10–15 persons was appropriate for the study. This chapter shows the details on the use of interviews to collect data while assessing the role reliability and validity played in the research process. The chapter also explains the critical role ethics played in the research and identified the various ethical issues in the study.

Research Design and Rationale

This qualitative study explored the experiences of African American single mothers with the child welfare system in NYC. Qualitative researchers can explore how participants develop understandings or meanings of their experiences (Patton, 2015). A qualitative approach for this study provided an in-depth look at policy feedback using the experiences of African American single mothers, with a focus on linking it to race and their interactions with the child welfare system. Understanding the shared perceptions of African American single mothers can help inform on their ideas held on child protective investigations.

Data for this qualitative research were collected by conducting telephone and face to-face interviews, using open-ended questions developed around the topic of the study to answer the two research questions:

1. What are the experiences of NYC African American single mothers of the child protection policies on their child abuse cases?
2. What are African American single mothers' views on the solutions needed to improve their experiences with the child welfare system?

A qualitative study involves using a small sample to establish relationships and patterns in the meanings developed by participants (Creswell, 2009). I used a small sample to gather the experiences developed by African American single mothers from interactions held directly or indirectly with the NYC child welfare system. My goal was to lead to social change that will help address the ongoing issues African Americans face with the child welfare system. The advocacy worldview tends to focus on a political or a reform agenda to facilitate social change for a marginalized or disadvantaged group that faces social issues such as oppression, inequality, alienation, or domination (Creswell, 2009). This philosophical approach to inquiry is aligned with the research as African Americans face discrimination and inequality in the social world and facilitating positive social change is essential for this marginalized group.

Role of the Researcher

I have worked for the ACS for over 10 years, and I am a child protective manager with the agency in Brooklyn, NYC. I have a vast knowledge of the laws and social policies governing child welfare and safety. I was faced with potential biases that develop due to preconceived ideas and views of how the child welfare system works from past experiences as an employee of ACS. Bias is any influence by the researcher during the

study that will negatively impact the study results (Gladas, 2017). The researcher should reflect on how their value and opinions may affect each step of the research process (Gladas, 2017). I addressed the potential for bias in the research by taking a reflexive approach. Reflexivity in research involves a systematic approach of reflecting on potential bias by identifying their viewpoints, relationship, or settings that may impact the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I took reflexive notes during the research on thoughts, feelings, and assumptions held. I also did not conduct any interviews or sample recruitment in the borough of Brooklyn, which is considered my work area. Reflexivity also occurs when the researcher provides transparency and the researcher's position and how it could affect data collection and analysis (Walker et al., 2013). I allowed transparency in the research by revealing my present title with ACS and role-played with the agency.

Methodology

Description of Research Population

I gathered data through interviews with single African American single mothers in NYC. I conducted telephone and held face-to-face interviews with the participants. Respondents were given the option to participate via video conferencing or regular telephone interviews due to concern about the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, alternative forms of collecting data via telephone, address restrictions on face-to-face meetings (Nippon Foundation Ocean Nexus Center, 2020). Telephone interviews help increase the efficiency of the data collection process and reduced the time and cost

in traveling to various field sites to collect data (Block & Erskine, 2012). The participants for the study were recruited from the Borough of Bronx and Queens in NYC and had past child welfare investigations within the last 10 years.

Sample Recruitment

I recruited the sample for the study using a non-probability purposive sampling approach. I utilized a combination of criterion-based and snowball sampling, which resulted in rich information cases for the research. Purposive samples are judgment samples in which the researcher makes subjective selections of the sample that seems to be representative of the population (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). This type of sampling leads to a smaller sample that is heterogeneous or homogenous in characteristics (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). I used criterion-based sampling in selecting African American single mothers who have had experiences with the child welfare system within the past ten years, which provided a deeper insight into this specific group (see Saunders & Townsend, 2018).

I sent letters and flyers to churches and community-based organizations seeking assistance with referrals and prospective participants for the study. The flyers and letters for the study highlighted the four main criteria; participants had to be African American single mothers with 1–10 years of prior child welfare involvement and reside in Brooklyn and Queens, NYC. I also sent letters and emails to churches and community-based organizations connected with child welfare to recruit participants for the study. Churches and community-based organizations presented an excellent opportunity to recruit

participants engaged in non-mandated services. I sought permission from participants to conduct telephone or face-to-face interviews on the research topic.

Sample Size Saturation

Ten participants took part in the study resulting in saturation for this qualitative research. Data collected from cases that provide in-depth information can be valuable to research (Patton, 2005). I selected African American single mothers for the study, which may be replicated in any research within the United States. African American single mothers share a similar history, culture, and experiences that represent the social and economic challenges faced by the group within the United States. An appropriately selected sample could be repeated with the same population and not show significant differences in the population parameters (Franfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2014). The hope is that the research can depict the policy needs for African American single mothers. The selection of a sample size of at least 10 participants was also appropriate for this timeframe for this dissertation.

Procedures for Data Collection

Interviews

I collected data for the study through telephone and face-to-face interviews. In-depth interviewing provides researchers with a comprehensive understanding of the sample's feelings and experiences by asking open-ended questions, which also helps build rapport with the sample (Patton, 2015). I conducted interviews with participants using semistructured questions. In semistructured interviews, participants are encouraged

to share their own experiences (Patton, 2015), compared to asking questions in chronological order to show differences among the interviewee's responses and experiences on the topic (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). Nonstructured or semistructured allows researchers to explore other areas on the issue with more freedom when compared to structured interviews.

The research questions developed for the study (see Appendix) were centered around research questions on the experiences of African American families with child protection policies and their views on solutions they faced. The questions also focused on African American single mothers' views on support and challenges from their experiences with the child welfare system during past investigations. The questions engaged participants in providing open responses on experiences with child protective staff while also focusing on the challenges of being an African American single parent. The questions also allowed participants to share solutions to their problems from their involvement with the child welfare agency. The questions engaged participants around what solutions they believed are needed to reduce the number of African Americans involved in the child welfare system. The questions were designed using the theoretical foundation. The questions on race focused on challenges and solutions African Americans face with the child welfare system. The questions on the family system were developed by assessing the social support challenges of being a single parent interacting with the child welfare system.

During the research process, I documented and recorded the experiences shared by the participants. Cypress (2018) described interviewing as an informal process conducted with 7-10 persons and allowed the opportunity to gather the essence of the meaning through open-ended questions. I was concerned with having the respondents share their thoughts while collecting any experiences, feelings, attitudes, and experiences towards the child welfare system. Interviewing the sample about their experiences and life stories triggered feelings of remorse, anger, and anxiety of some participants with past negative interaction with the child welfare agency. I also probed participants' beliefs and gather their views on leadership support necessary to address their fears with the investigative process. I collected data from a sample of 10 African American single mothers within the borough of the Bronx and Queens of NYC.

The data collection occurred within an approximate duration of three months. I held telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews with participants at times that were convenient to them. Before conducting the interviews, I informed each participant about the purpose of the research and provided them with consent forms to sign. I also thoroughly explained that participation is voluntary, and participants can exit the study at any time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data was collected using a tape recorder, and I used notetaking to document observations. I recorded observations in a journal, taking descriptive and reflective notes (Creswell, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Each interview occurred over an approximate duration of 45 minutes to an hour. The data collected will be stored in a locked drawer in my home.

Instrument Development

The instrument to collect data focused on questions that reflect the combination of the foundational theories used in the study (appendix A). Table 1. shows that each question was designed to gain experiences and views of African American single mothers on the child welfare system. Each interview question response was coded to identify themes and patterns within the data that relate to the emotions and values of the participants that are relevant to the study. The instrument was adequate in collecting the data intended as it uses a combination of theories in which African American single mothers' interactions, behaviors, and experiences. I interpreted participants' responses using the three theories to address the issues of racism and discrimination while also understanding the family as a unit and the role played in policy development and reform.

Table 1*Theories Related to Interview Questions*

Theory	Central Question	Follow Up Questions
Policy Feedback Theory		
Citizenship	Describe your willingness to participate with child welfare services?	What your experiences with the services you were involved in?
Form of Governance	What support do you believe is needed in the African American community to reduce the number of children involved in child welfare?	How competent you believe the child welfare agency is in addressing the needs of African Americans?
Power of Groups	In what ways do you think you and your child have been impacted by being in a single parent household?	How have you been managing in caring for your child/children?
Political Agendas	What supports were provided to you during your child welfare investigation?	
Critical Race Theory		
Race is Ordinary	What barriers have you faced in meeting the requirements set forth by child protective staff?	What challenges you have had if any in understanding child welfare procedures of policy?
Interest Convergence	Why do you think there is a high number of African American children involved in the child welfare system?	
Social Construction	Tell me about your experiences with engaging child protective staff around any challenges faced with the child welfare system?	
Voice of Color	What ideas will you suggest improving your experience with the child welfare system?	
Bowens Family System Theory		
Societal Emotional Process	What experiences if any you have had with child protection investigations? If positive – explain If negative, explain	

Data Analysis Plan

Coding Strategies

I incorporated an inductive approach to analyze data collected for the research. Inductive coding scheme is a method in which codes are assigned to participants' open-ended responses and observations (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) helps researchers code, manage, and sort through data that otherwise would be time-consuming to complete. CAQDAS helps in increasing the speed at which qualitative data is coded and analyzed, giving researchers the ability to explore or generate theories (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). Saldana (2009) said that CAQDAS is also important for efficiently storing, managing, and reconfiguring qualitative data analysis. The data collected from each participant was coded and placed into categories and themes using qualitative data analysis software.

Research has shown that CAQDAS software is a better method for coding extensive data when compared to using hand-coding. CAQDAS software gives researchers the ability to identify links between data passages while also creating and developing codes for them (Silver & Lewins, 2014). For this research, I used NVIVO Software to assist in coding the interviews held with African American single mothers who provided in-depth information on their experiences with the complex child welfare system. Saldana (2016) explained CAQDAS software has the advantage over hand-coding as it provided me with the opportunity to code, recode, merge, and move back and

forth throughout the data at a quick pace while also observing for patterns with experiences respondents have with child abuse.

Table 2 shows the preliminary research question and coding guide I used for this study. I coded the data using 1st and 2nd level coding. I also analyzed the data for themes and patterns. I took reflexive notes and memos of observations, researchers' biases, and statements that are pertinent to the study. I utilized the Affective coding methods, including In Vivo, Emotion, Values, and Focus coding, to collect data from African American single mothers. Saldana (2015) shared the Affective method of coding assesses human experience, values, and emotions. Focus, Emotion, Process, and In Vivo. Vivo coding will help me identify sections, phrases, or words in the data that are important to understanding participants' lived experiences in the study.

Table 2

Preliminary Coding Framework

Theories	Codes	Questions
Policy Feedback Theory	Citizenship	7, 8., 9, 11, 12
	Form of Governance	All questions
	Power of Groups	2, 4, 8, 9, 10 & 11
	Political Agendas	9, 10 & 11

Critical Race Theory	Equality/ Equity within Child Welfare	5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12
	Racism/Unconscious Bias	5, 6, 7, 8, 10 & 11, 12
	Interest Convergence	9, 10
	Social Construction	9, 10, 11, 12, 13
Bowen Family Systems	Societal Emotional Process	5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12

Vivo coding is revealing words that indicate a specific idea shared by the respondent. Focused coding will identify the critical and most frequent codes within the data (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004). Focused coding involves the researcher making links between similar ideas and insights within the data while also identifying themes and patterns (O'Reilly, 2009). I used Focus coding to identify relationships between the data and themes and trends related to the underlined theories. I documented the observation of participants' moods and feelings using Emotional Coding. Words and phrases within the data that hint at participants' shared emotions was coded.

Issues of Trustworthiness

It is the responsibility of the researcher to follow appropriate ethical practices when conducting the research. In this study, there was a balancing the emotions and reactions of parents' responses to child abuse and meeting the data requirements for this study. Researchers need to balance the cost and benefits of research while considering ethical guidelines moral alternatives and weighing the value of the impact of each decision made (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). Ethical issues may emerge in

addressing areas or concerns of confidentiality and privacy. Ethical treatment of human subjects focuses on voluntary participation and respect issues (O'Sullivan, 2017). Ethical considerations include ensuring justice, and the research benefits outweigh the potential harm to participants (O'Sullivan, 2017).

Credibility

Establishing credibility in the study plays an essential role in the research. Credibility is described as the believability of the research data while also focusing on the relationship established between the participant and the researcher (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). This research collected data from African American single mothers who provided valuable data around impact of child welfare policy. The data was collected through a qualitative approach using interviews and practices by the standards set by the IRB. Researchers could use "persistent observation" to establish credibility by identifying critical aspects of the data related to the problem researched (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I used persistent observation during interviews conducted with participants.

Transferability

Transferability in research is the ability of the study to show external validity and that the results can be generalized to other populations (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). I selected questions aligned with the qualitative research topic, which may be reciprocated in another study outside of NYC to create external validity. Korstjens and Moser (2018) described the 'thick description' strategy in which the research relates an aspect of the study that may be relevant to individuals outside of the research group.

Ravitch and Carl (2015) described thick description as the researcher conceptualizing the data, which will allow readers to relate meanings to the data collected. I also identified and described behaviors and experiences of African American mothers' child welfare experiences that may relate to other parents outside of NYC.

Dependability

Ravitch and Carl (2015) defined dependability as achieving stability within the data in which consistency occurs when the data is aligned with the argument of the research. Dependability is achieved in the study as I debrief with other researchers in the field and incorporated feedback on the research questions. I informed participants of the goal and purpose of the research. Using respect and empathy in the data collection process was critical to reducing the potential risk of past traumatic experiences with the child welfare system. I will minimize risk by destroying the confidential data information of the research after the research is published.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which other researchers can confirm the data in the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The main idea of confirmability is to assess the researcher's biases that may influence the interpretation of the data. I used strategies of positionality and reflexivity to control for confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). I also kept reflexive notes to highlight thoughts and observations while collecting data through interviews. I also provided details on my knowledge and any affiliation with child welfare that may impact my views or opinions of the child welfare system.

Content Validity

Reliability and validity are vital factors to consider when conducting a study. Rudestam and Newton (2015) explained the difference between the two elements by explaining that reliability is the ability of the research to be generalized to a larger group or setting. Rudestam and Newton further stated that internal validity focuses on the trustworthiness of the research regarding the data collected, interpretations, and generalizations made. Research should focus on maintaining internal validity and serve the valuable purpose of being applied to natural settings in other populations (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). Creating social change to address child abuse among minorities through qualitative data can be used by researchers on a local and international scale.

Ethical Considerations

It is the responsibility of the researcher to follow appropriate ethical practices when conducting the research. Frankfort-Nachmias et al. (2015) explained the need for researchers to weigh the value of the impact of each ethical decision made. Ethical issues may emerge in addressing areas or concerns of confidentiality and privacy. O'Sullivan et al. (2017) shared that the principles of ethical treatment of human subjects focus on voluntary participation and respect issues. O'Sullivan et al. also stated that ethical considerations include ensuring justice, and the research benefits outweigh the potential harm to participants. Walden University Institutional Board granted the approval for this research (approval no. 06-18-21-0482273).

Respect

In this research, I focused on maintaining respect by keeping timely appointments and ensuring appropriate language, facial expressions, and responses are used to conduct interviews with respondents. Rubin and Rubin (2012) shared the need for interviews to be responsive to the feelings and emotions of participants. The researcher must be flexible to change the course of the questions asked when respondents are affected by it.

Confidentiality of Data

In this study, I ensured data provided by respondents are kept to the strictest privacy and confidence. Confidentiality and privacy for the research will be of utmost importance as the data may be compromised through formal or informal conversations on the topic. The data presented for the study had no identifying information of respondents to achieve anonymity and confidentiality. Also, the data collected was adequately maintained and kept secured in a locked drawer in my home. I was mindful that the pertinent information regarding the participants was not revealed, and I will ensure that the data is appropriately shredded and discarded after the research is published.

Privacy

Maintaining privacy is essential in research in which parents shared details on their cases that are or were investigated by the State of New York.) It is the researcher's responsibility to assure privacy, especially in a time when computerized data is vulnerable to outside interest groups (Frankfort-Nachmias, & Nachmias et al., 2015). Maintaining privacy, researchers should consider the dimensions of sensitivity to the

information provided and the setting in which participants are observed (Frankfort-Nachmias, et al., 2015). Participants for this research were interviewed in a safe and secure environment where responses would not be revealed.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Anonymity indicates that there is no identifying information of the participants in the data. Researchers face the ethical challenges of balancing confidentiality and anonymity during the research process. Securing the identity and confidentiality of participants in research is a challenge to some researchers when confronted with how to secure the identity of participants during the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher is the main instrument of this qualitative study and will ensure anonymity is maintained throughout the research process. At each phase of the study, I also examined positionality to avoid any ethical mishaps that adversely affect confidentiality, transparency, and misconduct.

Informed Consent

This study provided informed consent, which educated participants on the goals and benefits of the study along with the possible impact it may have on their feelings if they had past interactions or cases with a child welfare agency. I provided each respondent with informed consent to voluntarily participate or opt-out of the research. Informed consent had been a part of federal guidelines requiring research participants to be informed of the risk of being involved in the research whenever there is the potential

risk for emotional or physical and psychological harm (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015).

Please see the Appendix B for a copy of the informed consent.

Summary

The qualitative approach of inquiry collected data from a small sample, which was made up of a convenience sample of African American single mothers in NYC who are affected by the complexity of child policies and procedures. I used telephone and face-to-face interviews that consist of open-ended questions designed to gather a narrative or open response from single parent mothers on their experiences with the child protection system in NYC. I also utilized the guidelines of the qualitative study approach to collect information from the sample to gain the meanings and experiences held from having child protective case.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American single mothers' experiences with the child welfare system in NYC. The research questions for this study were designed to allow respondents to have a voice in providing the solutions they believe are necessary to reduce African Americans involved in the child welfare system:

1. What are the experiences of NYC African American single mothers of the child protection policies on their child abuse cases?
2. What are African American single mothers' views on the solutions needed to improve their experiences with the child welfare system?

This research focused on gathering information that can help policymakers reduce issues of racial disparity and disproportionality associated with the child welfare system. The study also expands on prior research done in the field.

In this chapter, I will provide details on the study's setting, including the demographics of the sample and the procedures and methods that I used to collect the data for the study. I will also present the data, including the preset codes and emerging codes that were analyzed using NVivo software. The data include quotes and the interpretation of some of the responses provided. The chapter also provides insight into the steps taken to ensure credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability in the data collection process. The study highlight's key themes and patterns observed in the

data and tables to reflect the frequencies in responses and how they correlate to the key findings.

Setting

Seven of the interviews were conducted over the phone, and three were conducted face to face on the participants' preference. Of the face-to-face interviews conducted, one participant was interviewed at her home, and I followed COVID-19 guidelines by wearing a mask and keeping 6 feet away. The interview I held at respondent's home was done on the outside in a private area to maintain confidentiality. The other two face-to-face interviews were conducted at a community park about 10-15 feet away from persons to create a sense of privacy. All participants signed the consent forms sent or handed to them before the interview. The interviews conducted were engaging, and five participants expressed feeling privileged to participate in my study. Participants recruited in the neighborhood park provided information on their past experiences with ACS. At times participants rushed through some of the responses due to wanting to get back to their routines.

Study Demographics

The study consisted of 10 African American single mothers from Queens and The Bronx, NYC. Two participants were from the Bronx, and the other eight were selected from Queens. The low number of participants recruited from the Bronx due to limited accessibility and the high cost of tolls to get to the Bronx. I made three trips to the Bronx to recruit participants, and it cost a total of \$35 for each trip. Additionally, there were no

responses from partner organizations in the Bronx, and the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to outreach to staff as they were working remotely. Queens provided easy access to participants and did not require a transportation toll cost. The participants met the criteria for the study as they were single African American parents who lived with their children and provided primary care for them. The parents before the interview reported having closed cases with no involvement in any active services or programs with ACS. Past involvement with ACS spans from 2–5 years, as shown in Table 3. Participants' number of children to care for ranged from one child to the most being four children in a single-parent household. Four of the participants in the study had an age range of 35–44, the oldest participant was between age 65–74, and the youngest had an age range of 18–24. Three of the participants had past court involvement in the child welfare system, and only two participants had prior experience in dealing with the foster care system.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participants	Age Range	Last ACS case timeline	Number of children	Borough
P1	45-54	5 years	4	Queens
P2	35-44	2 years	1	Bronx
P3	35-44	2 years	2	Queens
P4	65-74	4 years	3	Queens
P5	45-54	6 years	2	Bronx
P6	25-34	2 years	1	Queens
P7	55-64	3 years	3	Queens

P8	35-44	2 years	1	Queens
P9	35-44	4 years	1	Queens
P10	18-24	3 years	1	Queens

Data Collection Procedures

The data for the study were collected through qualitative interviews conducted with 10 African American single mothers with closed cases with ACS. All participants signed the consent form and agreed to participate in the study. Interviews consisted of semistructured interviews that encouraged conversation around participants' experiences with the child welfare system in NYC. Interviews ranged from 1 hour and 30 minutes to the lowest time being 30 minutes. The participants with the most concerns with the child welfare system were observed to have a longer interview as they provided several examples of their experiences. Interviews were recorded under the protocol and approved plan of the IRB. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the request of participants who felt pleased with the interview being held in person. I followed the COVID-19 and IRB requirements and protocols during data collection. No unusual circumstances impacted the data collected. I used an audio recorder to record the interviews and transferred the data to my laptop.

During the interview, I also took notes to reflect on areas I would like to probe further. I also wrote memo notes to reflect on areas where I may have developed a biased response. I documented my notes on a table representing each participant to compare my thought process and ensure that the collected, interpreted, and presented data is objective

and not influenced by personal biases as a child protective manager with ACS. During and after the interview, I revisited answers provided by participants to clarify and fully understand the responses to achieve triangulation in the study.

The semistructured questions (Appendix) were used to probe and engage participants around their experiences with the child welfare system and what they believe are the solutions to addressing racial disparity and disproportionality for African Americans. All the participants appeared engaged and shared their experiences with examples of their interaction with child welfare staff and programs. I had to redirect and refocus participants throughout the interviews on their shared experiences with ACS. I reduced tension or heightened emotion during the interview.

Data Analysis Procedures

The recorded responses of the interviews were transcribed using dictate from Microsoft, and I made manual corrections to inaccurate transcriptions. Each typed interview was uploaded to NVivo, where the files were stored and analyzed. Using the NVivo software, the data were first analyzed using the pre-existing codes from the theoretical framework identified for the study. Initially selected codes include citizenship, governance, power of groups, racial bias, social construction, and societal emotional process. These codes represent policy feedback, critical race, and BFST. I identified patterns and emerging themes by highlighting and coding the words and phrases of each participant's experiences similar to the description of the pre-existing codes.

I observed codes such as governance and citizenship to reach saturation faster due to most of the interview questions emphasizing experiences and involvement with the child welfare system. I used the NVivo software to code words and phrases to identify frequency and similarities in responses which gave insight into the participants' experiences with the child welfare system. The data retrieved from the pre-existing codes were coded again using NVivo to identify emerging themes by identifying similar and varying phrases for patterns.

Identifying Themes

I used NVivo to deductively code for phrases and words using the preliminary codebook of pre-existing codes related to policy feedback, critical race, and the societal emotional process of Bowen's theory. I used the pre-existing codes to identify similar words, phrases, or experiences from each participant. I color-coded each section using NVivo, which led to emerging themes such as implicit bias, distrust of the child welfare system, financial struggles and absent father challenges, unprofessionalism, forced participation, partnership, education, and the cycle of poverty.

Table 4 shows the coding analysis conducted for the study as pre-codes around the theories of the study assisted in coding the experiences of African American single mothers' responses. I coded the responses by participants using NVivo to look for patterns and themes. The emerging themes identified under PFT were forced participation, lack of resources and understanding, fear and stigma, and distrust of the child welfare system. The emerging themes under CRT identified included the cycle of

poverty, implicit bias, stereotyping, and partnership and education. Using the BFST, I utilized the emerging themes of financial struggles and childhood trauma. The study revealed 86 coded references under PFT of the form of governance, resulting in the highest number of references selected from 10 participants. When I coded the form of governance, I identified the emerging theme of lack of resources and understanding by parents of child welfare policies by participants in the sample. Social construction had the lowest number of references, which was 21 from eight participants in the study.

Table 4*Codes and Themes*

Theories	Codes	Emerging Themes	Files	References
PFT	Citizenship	Forced Participation-Stress; left out of decision making; Fearful of the worker; Shocked and angry; Threats of court involvement; Poor relationship with child protective staff.	10	66
PFT	Form of Governance	Lack of resources and understanding of child welfare policy- Dislike and fear of investigational protocols; Negative public stigma;	10	83
PFT	Political Agendas	Fears and stigma of child welfare- Fears of child removal, Targeted, Child welfare viewed as agency of oppression	10	60
PFT	Power of Groups	Distrust in child welfare system- Stressed out, uneducated on child welfare policies and rights, more money and support needed for African American children and neighborhoods, fear of the child welfare system.	10	27
CRT	Equality and Equity within Child Welfare Racism and unconscious Bias	Implicit Bias- unprofessionalism, stereotypes, judgmental, Stereotyping; Disrespect to parent by child welfare staff, Labelling, and parent blaming	10	40
CRT	Interest Convergence	Cycle of Poverty-Public Assistance Connection, African Americans Mentality, Child welfare design to oppress, poor treatment by child welfare staff, Continuous cycle; money making business; poor	8	18
CRT	Racism and Unconscious Bias	Implicit Bias- unprofessionalism, stereotypes, judgmental, Stereotyping; Disrespect to parent by child welfare staff, Labelling; Parent blaming.	9	40
CRT	Social Construction	Stereotyping- Judgmental, labelling, disrespectful, treating parent like a child	8	21
CRT	Voice of Color	Partnership and Education-Targeted services, parental education by child welfare staff, support, resources, communication, cultural sensitivity training, school and medical resources, reducing false calls to ACS	9	60

BFST	Societal Emotional Process	Financial struggles and absent father challenges-minimal or no support from fathers or other relatives; emotional parent and difficulty meeting financial needs	10	50
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Table 5 reflects the emerging themes identified in the study in which I coded the patterns observed in the responses collected. The coding resulted in similarities of responses in which lack of resources had the second-highest theme with 36 references and the lowest being forced participation with seven references. Implicit bias varied in the data under exploring equity and equality, but in analyzing racism and unconscious bias, implicit bias resulted in the highest number of references from seven participants.

Table 5

References to Themes

Emerging Themes	# of participants	References
Forced Participation	4	7
Lack of resources and understanding of child welfare policy	10	36
Fear and stigma of child welfare system	7	26
Distrust of the Child welfare system	7	14
Stereotyping	7	17
Cycle of Oppression	5	17
Financial and absent fathers' challenges	10	33
Child/Children Trauma	8	13
Implicit Bias	7	40
Partnership and Education	8	20

Table 6 represents the coded sentiments of the participant's responses in the study from positive to negative. For example, if participants shared a positive experience, it was coded as a positive sentiment. However, I coded as moderately positive for a participant

who shared positive results from their child welfare engagement but reflected some issues. Negative sentiments were coded based on any statement or experience participants shared that was not beneficial from their engagement with ACS. From a review of the data collected, most respondents shared negative experiences, coded from 50 references made by 10 participants. Seven participants shared positive experiences with ACS. The negative responses are highlighted in Table 6.

Table 6

References to Sentiments

Sentiments Negative-Positive	# of participants	References
Positive	7	15
Very Positive	5	9
Moderately Positive	5	6
Negative	10	50
Very Negative	9	24
Moderately Negative	9	26

The positive responses from participants include the following:

- P1: “Most of the CPS, work around your time. They came out, and they saw the kids. They don’t stress you that much. They make sure the kids are ok.”
- P10: “ACS worker eased my fears and shared that he is not trying to remove my child from me because you know that was one of my fears as a child that ACS was going to remove me from my mother.”

- P2: “I am a people person, and I clicked well with ACS worker who helped me with resources of getting free stuff. ACS staff was very respectful.

Got paperwork and constant reminders ACS workers were on top of me to make sure I get things done. Ensure that she goes to the doctor, they speak with school and also informed me that they will visit twice a month.”

- P3: “They understood my situation, and I understand what needs to be done”
“Even when I was confused, they explained things to me.”

- P4: “For the most part, they were unbiased”

“Their understanding of me being a single mother and the difficulties I had. In the case of the caseworkers, they have been helpful in terms of going to the class.” The caseworker gave me options where to go, and they made it convenient for me.”

- P8: “My worker helped get my child into an after-school program and summer camp, which was quite a relief.”

- P9: “I know that ACS is here to protect the child” “Not to create division. Just a short that we don’t have to be afraid of ACS.”

Societal Emotional Process—Financial Struggles and Absent Fathers

BFST is captured in the study to help understand the African American single parent structure is impacted through interaction with the child welfare system. The research questions also focused on understanding African American single parents’ challenges and their support. The use of family systems theory provided context to any

potential social issues experienced by African Americans' family structure through involvement in the child welfare system. The participants' responses indicated minimal or no support from the fathers of their children. There were also issues and challenges around parent and child emotional trauma resulting from the family structure, which led to the emerging themes of financial struggles and absent fathers.

P1 reported having no family support as a single parent and receiving no child support despite several court steps to get financial support for her children. P1 explained experiences where she had difficulty meeting her children's needs for food and clothing. P1 further shared that being a single parent impacted her children as they did not get a chance to know their father. P2 explained the concerns of facing financial struggles as a single parent and dealing with her son who has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) with no father figure in his life. P2 also felt she has no social life and must financially care for everything. P3 also reported having financial struggles as a single parent and described her children as sad when they saw her struggling as a parent. P3 also shared taking days off without pay to attend classes recommended by child welfare staff.). P4 stated that she has been managing in providing care for children but shared the concern of feeling guilty as she cannot spend adequate time with her children. P5 discussed in her responses that her children miss having a father figure in their life as he used to live with them, but due to his drug use, he is not allowed in the home.

P5 also shared her sons' trauma from being in several foster homes before returning to her care. P7 also struggled financially with her children as she stated that for

the past five years, she has been fighting for child support. P7 also indicated that her children cried and showed anger when they visited their father. P8 explained having limited financial resources for her children as a single parent and stated that there were times her food supply for her children was low.

Citizenship—Forced Participation

Forced Participation was observed as an emerging theme from analyzing the similar responses of the sample as the role of citizenship is examined using PFT. The participants responded to questions about their experiences and willingness to participate in a child welfare investigation. Participant's response highlighted issues of fear of the caseworker upon threats of removal or continued mandated involvement in the child welfare system. There were also issues of stressed and poor relationships with child welfare staff as identified by participants who felt left out of the decision-making steps on their cases. For example

P1: "I always spoke my mind. They do something I don't like. They tried to threaten me, and I would threaten them too. I remember one of the workers who went back to the office and said something different. I was signing up for all kinds of programs and I said I let the supervisor know I am not doing any programs."

P10: "First of all, why I need to do drug treatment for marijuana. At the conference, I was told that it is what I need to do to make my case go away and also do drug testing."

P3: “I didn’t do anything wrong. Why do I need to take parenting classes? She said it’s ok to work. I said it’s ok just do parenting classes to get it over with. Felt I was forced to do these classes. Classes I didn’t need in the end.”

P4: “I was not included in the decision-making. They said my daughter on drugs. They must say I am on drugs as well.”

P5: “The baby was in the hospital for a few weeks, and I had checked myself into a drug program, and they still refused to let me get my child. I even asked to go into a mother and child program with my son, and they said no. They brought the case to court, and my lawyer refused to fight it because he said I did not get my other child back.”

P9: “I was forced to participate. I did not learn anything meaningful. I had to pay for the classes. had to do it at that time and the places that they gave it.”

Lack of Understanding Child Welfare Policies—Form of Governance

Lack of understanding of child welfare policy emerged as a theme when analyzing questions around governance under PFT. I analyzed participants’ experiences with the child welfare system around access to resources and understanding of child welfare investigational policies and procedures concerning their views on other ethnic or racial groups. The responses by participants in the study yielded some concerns of a pattern of reporting a dislike and fear of child welfare policies and the negative stigma associated with it. For instance, P1 shared that some African American parents are likely to let their children go into foster as they have limited resources to care for them.

P10 spoke to the lack of assistance from the child welfare system in addressing the needs of African American neighborhoods where there is a high number of ACS cases. P10 also shared experiences of observing caseworkers focused mainly on identifying what African American parents did wrong rather than helping them. P10 reported observing African American children getting involved in the foster care system as their parents commit crimes to care for their families. P10 further highlighted the stigma and lack of trust in the child welfare system due to child deaths under ACS watch.

P2 stated that there is a need for more resources in school to help children of single parents to avoid and deter any future involvement in the child welfare system. P4 discussed experiences with children placed in the foster care system and explained that the children were traumatized from not being placed in a home. P4 felt if her children were from a Jewish home, the child welfare staff would have found an appropriate foster home for her children.

I observed a common theme around the lack of understanding of the child welfare system in the lived experiences of P5, P6, P7, P8, and P9, and they shared concerns around the accessibility of resources around child welfare education policies and procedures that affect African Americans. P5 shared the experience of having a child in foster care and not understanding the child welfare system on how it may impact her having another child. P6 stated, "Because some people probably don't understand how ACS works. Instead of trying to help us out, we just get blamed for things we sometimes are not responsible for." P7 and P8 shared similar experiences around not understanding

child welfare policies during their investigations around caseworkers' protocols around school visits and how cases get reported to the child welfare system. P9, in a similar response, shared the experience of being arrested for not having any knowledge of child welfare laws around the use of corporal punishment. P9 also stated concerns that some parents from the Caribbean who have no understanding of how the child welfare system works, get caught up in the system, and are shocked how it happened.

Political Agendas—Fear and Stigma of the Child Welfare System

Political Agendas under PFT are used to examine single mothers' perspectives on the child welfare staff competency and approach to addressing the high number of African Americans in the system. Fear and stigma of the child welfare system is the emerging theme from analyzing common phrases and words in the patterns of responses. Participants shared concerns around fears of child removal feeling targeted and oppressed when sharing experiences on the child welfare system. P1, in her interview, explained a bad experience where she believed a case was made against her maliciously as the incident with her child occurred at school. P2, in a similar view, stated that some of the schools that African Americans attend are made of predominantly white teachers who view corporal punishment as being abuse compared to the perspectives held by African Americans.

P4 spoke to the issue of African Americans being suppressed by the child welfare system, and there is no focus on educating parents. P6, in a related perspective, stated that African American parents do not understand how the child welfare system works, and

workers blame them for things they are not responsible for. P9 shared of experiences of African Americans being targeted explicitly by the child welfare system and being treated as a lesser set-in comparison to other racial or ethnic groups. P2 and P10 both stated the fear of ACS, threats made by caseworkers around their child/children being removed, and intentions to scare parents.

Power of Groups—Distrust in the Child Welfare System

Power of groups in PFT is utilized to assess the impact of child welfare policies on a specific interest group (African Americans). 10 African American single-parent mothers were interviewed and questioned on their past experiences with child welfare investigations and how it affects them as a group. A review of the coded responses resulted in respondents sharing stress, fear, distrust, and lack of parent support and education about the child welfare system. Distrust in the child welfare system was selected as the emerging theme after observing the patterns in the coded responses. P1, when interviewed, shared the need for parents to be trained on child welfare laws as caseworkers plan to scare them. P1 also stated that some parents are stressed and live on the edge, fearing caseworkers' visits to their home. P4 also shared the need for parents to be educated on child welfare policies as they face oppression and the continuous process of their children ben placed in foster care. P6 stated that parents do not understand how ACS works, and there is a need for ACS to explain child welfare policies to them. P8 also said that African Americans who do not understand child welfare policy could be ignorant of child abuse and neglect.

P10 spoke to the lack of child welfare policies addressing financial support for black neighborhoods and African parents' struggles with money for their children. P5 addressed her experience with the child welfare system and shared those parents struggle and get caught up in ACS as no one cares about the community. P7 shared the difficulty in not having enough money to hire a lawyer to fight her ACS case. P10 reported distrust for ACS and stated the need to remove and replace the child welfare agency. P3, when interviewed, shared her experience with being labeled as an angry black woman by child protective workers and the need for cultural sensitivity training for caseworkers. P9 stated that African Americans are targeted by child welfare policies and are treated negatively compared to other groups.

Interest Convergence—Cycle of Oppression

The cycle of oppression was coded as the emerging themes after a review of participants' responses around questions that focused on gathering their experiences with the child welfare system and whether it addresses the interest of African Americans compared to other ethnic groups. In exploring interest convergence in CRT, the questions for the research led to a pattern of responses describing the child welfare system as leading to oppression and public assistance dependence as some respondents liken it to a continuous cycle that affects the African American community. Some participants used words such as oppression, poor treatment, poverty, mentality and described the child welfare system as a money-making business. Some participants discussed observing a

relationship between the child welfare system and public assistance in maintaining the oppression of African Americans. These responses are highlighted below.

P1, provided detailed information on experience on the child welfare system by linking the cycle of parents having children to get public assistance. As a result, they also get involved in the child welfare system. P1 shared that the involvement of families in child welfare and public assistance system has created a cycle that has kept African Americans lazy and poor. P1, further stated the need for African Americans to be educated as they are depressed and oppressed by the child welfare system.

P4 shared a similar view and stated African Americans are being suppressed and depressed by the child welfare system. P5 observed African Americans struggle with peer pressure, drugs, and gangs. P5 further stated that there is a lack of care for African American communities, and several parents, as a result, get involved in the child welfare system. P7, in her interview, shared that African Americans as a group struggle with finding jobs, and parents find it challenging to provide for their children. P10 stated, “A lot of black people get in crime and rob and steal because they have no money or ways to take care of themselves; as a result, their children get caught up in the foster care system.”

Social Construction—Stereotyping

Social Construction under CRT was used to explore whether there are any verbal or non-verbal forms of discrimination from analyzing the experience of single mothers with the child welfare system. Seven mothers within the study explained issues of

caseworkers being judgmental, disrespectful, and treating them as children, which led to the emerging theme of stereotyping given the patterns of their responses.

P1: "Some of them think everybody is on drugs and everybody is on crack, and they want to talk to you in any way."

P10: "I told the workers that I am not a drug addict, so don't put me as one. I know the workers were shocked by my response, but I had to tell them. I was scared when they came, and I thought they were going to remove my child."

P10: "I did not like that I was treated as a drug user at the beginning of the case, and there was no effort to find out the reason I smoked marijuana."

P3: "In a lot of cases, it's stereotyping because they're saying your angry black woman. If you raise your voice, they say you are angry if you raise your voice at your kids. Yeah, right when you are just reprimanding for just misbehavior. That's a stereotype."

P4: "I'm in a responsible job. The job I have a lot of responsibilities, even to maintain a license. See me as a nurse, not just like a bunch of people."

P5: "She spoke to me in an accusing way because of my history. When the drug test came back for only methadone, her behavior improved."

P5: "The workers treated me as I am a prostitute running the streets and using drugs. It was not like that. I only wanted a chance to do better and was not given that. I see why many parents lose their kids, and I have met many while visiting the foster care

agency and some of the parents are just tired with all the things that ACS is asking them to do.”

P7: “The first worker was female, and she acted as she believed everything the father told her. She was accusatory with me.”

P9: “I think we are sometimes targeted because of the color of our skin””

Equity and Equality and Implicit Bias

The study focused on equity and equality in the child welfare system by assessing the views of African American single mothers on whether their experiences with racial disparity and disproportionality through their past interactions with child protective workers. Discrimination is also explored by focusing on issues of racism and unconscious bias. Implicit bias represented the emerging theme as participants’ responses showed a pattern in experiencing bias from caseworkers being judgmental, disrespectful, unprofessional, and using labels when interacting with them. P1 described a caseworker being threatened and talked down to like a child during the investigation. P1 also shared an incident in which a caseworker offered her a list of food pantry places when her home already had adequate food. P10 reported feeling labeled as a ‘drug addict who just came off the streets’ and further described the feeling of not being treated as a person after child welfare staff found out she tested positive for marijuana.

P3 also spoke of being threatened of court involvement by the caseworker as she did not get the dental records for the investigation. P3 expressed feeling rushed by the caseworker, who failed to gather all the necessary documents before the 60th day of the

investigation. P3 also shared that she was threatened that the case would be prolonged if she did not provide documents to the caseworker. P3 further described meeting the caseworker supervisor, who acted happy she had a child welfare case and labeled her as an angry black woman. P3 described the child welfare numbers of African Americans to be high due to stereotypes held by caseworkers of parents.

P4, when interviewed, described the feeling of being lumped with all the persons in a child welfare investigation when she did nothing wrong. P3 also described child caseworkers to show a difference in finding foster homes for Jewish children compared to black children. P3 also stated that black foster care children are treated as outcasts. P3 also stated that caseworkers have a negative attitude towards her, and they used leading answers when interviewing the children in the home.

P5 also explained her experience of being judged guilty by caseworkers without giving a chance. P5 also described feeling offended and mad at the caseworker's approach during the investigation. P5 also described the struggles of getting her children out of the foster care system and observing parents' frustration of giving up their children due to the high demands and requirements to have them returned to their care. P6 shared the experience of her assigned caseworker being rude to her on the investigation and blamed her for the child's poor attendance at school as she had difficulty navigating the online school website. P6 shared that the worker's approach left a bad taste in her mouth.

P7 shared the experience of the caseworker being accusatory towards her in the investigation, and P9 shared the concerns of African Americans being targeted by the

child welfare system because of their skin color. P9 further provided an account of being arrested due to a child welfare case and she was not allowed to speak to her child. P9 reported that the school and child welfare staff believed everything her child said without first questioning to find out the truth.

Voice of Color—Partnership and Education

Voice of color is used from CRT to explore views of African Americans on the solutions to any negative experiences with racial disparity and disproportionality faced with the child welfare system. Voice of color addressed the second research question that explored what African American single mothers believe is needed to improve the child welfare system. I coded the participants' responses and observed similarities around views for targeted services, parental education, training, and improved communication by child welfare staff to help improve the child welfare system.

Partnership and education were selected as the theme as most respondents shared a need for education and training and were observed to suggest solutions to improve partnership with the child welfare system.

P1 provided solutions to experiences with racial disparity and disproportionality in the child welfare system. P1 explained the need for child welfare education for both parents and children. P1 also suggested the need for more counseling in school for children. P3, in a similar view, believed that there should be more counseling in school, and the school should provide resources to help parents before calling in child welfare cases on single mothers. P3 also stated that ACS needs to promote the agency more to

help parents know about the child welfare system. P3 further suggested that caseworkers need cultural sensitivity training to de-escalate situations through parent engagement. P1 stated that counseling for parents should help them deal with stress and understand the public assistance system and its impact.

P10 recognized the need for support through financial assistance to African American communities in helping to reduce crime and involvement in the child welfare system. P10 also advocated for more programs to help the community to help parents understand the child welfare system. P10 also mentioned the need for caseworkers to improve their engagement approach when speaking to parents. P2 believed that parents need anger management and parent training programs to reduce the use of corporal punishment with their children. P2 also shared that a caseworker should have good communication skills and help parents get into programs. P6 explained that ACS could reduce the high number of African Americans in the child welfare system by educating parents on their rights, the agency's role, and how it works. P7 observed the need for her experience for ACS to have a control measure to reduce the number of false reports being made against African Americans. P7 also advocated for caseworkers to gather the correct information from families during their visits. P8 shared the solution for ACS to engage in community outreach and set up town hall meetings to talk about issues in the community. Finally, P9 believed that ACS should set up training workshops to reduce parents' fear of the agency which will help build a bridge to partnership with the community.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility involves the researcher capturing their experiences throughout the data collection process and verifying the data results with the participants (Cope, 2014). To ensure credibility in the data, I debrief with each participant after each interview to clarify statements made during the interview and summarize their experiences. I also took notes of observations made during the interview and documented my feelings or biases held. I utilized member checking by discussing the findings with each participant via phone. Participants confirmed the results and believed the findings might be generalized to other New York and other surrounding States.

Transferability

Transferability as the research having external validity in which generalizations result in a case-to-case transfer establishing a degree of similarity (Patton, 2015). The findings of this data represent a depiction of the experiences of African Americans single mothers with the child welfare system in the boroughs of Queens and the Bronx, New York. The findings of this study may be generalized over a period to other boroughs or states. However, the methodology can be utilized and replicated in other areas to make comparisons with the findings of this data.

Dependability

To ensure consistency in the data, I kept the questions for the interviews aligned with the foundational theories utilized in the study. I also coded the responses to the

interviews using the pre-codes from the theories to identify patterns and themes around participants' experiences. During the data collection and analysis, I wrote down notes of observations made, which were used to clarify the findings using member checking. The careful review of the data ensured consistency and alignment of the data with the research purpose.

Confirmability

Confirmability in research is achieved when the data collected is that of the participants' perspectives and does not reflect the researchers' biases (Cope, 2015). Before conducting interviews, I selected a sample of participants from the main catchment area of cases accessible to me. As a result, I chose a sample from the Bronx and Queens, New York, as I work in Brooklyn. I established positionality at the onset of each interview, in which I informed all participants of my affiliation and employment with ACS. During the data collection process, I took reflective notes of any biases I held from the responses to ensure it was not reflected in my analysis. I also utilized persistent observation throughout the data collection process.

Summary

I attained the study results through in-depth interviews with African American single mothers in the Bronx and Queens, NY, in which there is a high number of African Americans in the child welfare system. The participants represented rich information cases as their past experiences as reflected in the data may be used by policymakers to

understand further the impact of child welfare policies on this specific group in relation to addressing racial disproportionality and disparity.

Policymakers may also use this data to gain insight into policy reforms tailored to African American single families that will help reduce the involvement of this group with the child welfare system. Researchers may also utilize this data to compare similar studies and findings to understand further child welfare policies related to African American involvement and other ethnic and racial groups.

The research used qualitative methodology, in which a sample was selected through purposive and snowball sampling to select rich information cases for the study. The data collection process involved member checking and persistent observation to ensure credibility and reflective notes of any bias I held to create content validity. The data was analyzed through coding for patterns and emerging themes around the main theories that are aligned with the study. The emerging descriptive themes provide insight to policymakers on issues of African American experiences with implicit bias, need for resources, parent support, and improved child welfare education and participation. In chapter 5, I provided an in-depth interpretation of the data with an explanation of the implications of the findings in the context to positive social change through policy reforms aimed to improve the outcomes of African Americans' experiences with the child welfare system. The interpretation of the data was completed using the theoretical framework of PFT and compared with peer-reviewed literature to provide insight for policy implications that may lay the foundation for future research on this topic.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study explored African American single mothers' experiences with the child welfare system. I aligned the research questions to the purpose of the study to gather information on African American single mothers' experiences with child welfare staff on closed investigations in the past 10 years in New York. I also gathered African American single mother's views on solutions to address racial disparity and disproportionality that affects the African American community. The study utilized PFT as the theoretical framework to create a feedback loop to policymakers and researchers on African American single mothers' experiences with the child welfare system while incorporating the family structure (BFST) and race (CRT).

I present a summary of the key findings in this chapter. I will also interpret the results and compare the data with the peer-reviewed literature on the theoretical framework on PFT, CRT, and BFST. I compare the details documented on the theories and their implication for future research and policy reforms. I also compare the literature review to the key findings to synthesize the information received and the feedback loop implication for policy reforms for the child welfare system.

Summary of the Findings

The data revealed that most single mothers faced financial struggles in caring for their children who also experienced the trauma of an absent father. Most of the sample also reported feeling forced to participate in the child protective investigation or services. The study also found that bias, fear, distrust, and lack of resources were significant

themes when participants interacted with the child welfare system. Implicit bias represented the highest number of references and emerged as a theme in the experiences of African American single mothers with the child welfare system. The data showed a total of 40 references from eight participants in the study related to phrases and statements of their experiences of feeling threatened, disrespected, or belittled by child welfare staff on their past investigations. I explored implicit bias under codes of equity and equality and racism and unconscious bias.

Furthermore, all the respondents in the study made 36 references related to access to resources and some limited understanding of the child welfare system. Issues around fear and distrust of the child welfare system emerged as key findings in the study. The sample shared concerns around a fear that ACS would remove their children when they experienced negative interactions with caseworkers. A total of seven respondents shared 26 references to issues around fear of the child welfare system. Participants reported distrust in the child welfare system in addressing the specific needs of African Americans. Some sample members believed that the child welfare system creates a cycle of poverty among African American communities, as observed in 17 references from five respondents.

The sample identified partnership and education as critical recommendations to address racial disparity and disproportionality in the child welfare system. The research identified partnership and education as a significant finding in as 80% of the sample

believe it is needed to address the high number of African Americans in the child welfare system.

Interpretation of Findings

Financial Struggles/Childhood Trauma

The data showed financial struggles and childhood trauma as relevant issues experienced by African American single mothers interviewed in the study. The family is an emotional unit reactive to any strains or tensions that can lead to anxiety and clinical problems (Bowen, 1976). 50% of African American mothers live in poverty (Graves, 2017), and there is a likelihood for Black children to have adverse experiences due to economic hardship (Ray et al., 2021). The financial struggles faced by African American single mothers may be explored further by researchers given these findings to examine the family as a unit and the access to child welfare resources compared to other ethnic groups. The trauma reported by mothers in the study due to having absent fathers emphasizes the level of support needed to help single mothers as a group through social and financial programs to reduce involvement in child welfare system. Policymakers need to understand African American challenges with the child welfare system to address their needs through this feedback loop (Thompson et al., 2019).

Implicit Bias

The data analysis revealed implicit bias as a critical finding that had the most references from all participants in the study. Participants shared concerns about being threatened and also disrespected by caseworkers. Child welfare administrators must

develop consciousness of underlying bias to keep checks and balances in the system, and a comprehensive plan is needed to understand and address how racism and oppression may occur within the organization (Harris & Hackett, 2007). Participants also shared fear and reported threats made by the child welfare agency that may be linked to systemic issues of implicit bias. The study findings raised questions around the social constructs held by workers and child welfare leadership on African Americans as a group, as respondents also shared a significant concern about feeling stereotyped by caseworkers. Prior research has also shown that caseworkers were biased and judgmental in dealing with African American families involved in the child welfare system (Font et al., 2012). Stereotyping stems from racist justifications to maintain economic, social, and political power over African Americans (Taylor et al., 2019). Bias experience by participants occurred through caseworker engagement and total perspective held of the child welfare system as being designed to oppress African Americans.

Some respondents in the study who reported distrust for the child welfare system have called for its removal. Participants' shared distrust of the child welfare system, which appears to be synonymous with negative experiences around the agency's ability to remove children from their homes. Under the social service law, the child welfare agency holds power to place maltreated children in foster care (New York State Senate, 2020). Seventy percent of respondents expressed experiences of fear, distrust, and feeling stereotyped by child welfare agencies which signal issues across all three emerging themes of problems associated with child welfare forms of engagement and policies.

Political agendas utilized in the study represents viewpoints held by African Americans on child welfare agency use and control of power through its ability to place children in foster care. The concern of forced participation in child welfare investigations and services emerged as a theme in exploring the experiences of African American single mothers with the child welfare system. Child welfare agencies often marginalize vulnerable families with less access to resources, making it important to have ethical considerations (Nissen & Engen, 2021). Some participants attributed forced participation to fear of court involvement or possible foster care placement of their children. Some respondents reported fear issues during ACS investigations and shared feelings of forced participation in ACS investigations and services.

The study also showed that a lack of resources is a significant issue facing African Americans in meeting their children's needs. The lack of resources is related to poverty concerns and limited access to social programs to address the occurrence of child maltreatment. Resources also speak to child welfare knowledge and education needed to minimize parental involvement in the child welfare system. All 10 participants experienced financial struggles as single parents. The challenges faced by single mothers financially led to the analysis of whether low-income families' lack of access to social and economic programs compared to other ethnic groups impacts their involvement in the child welfare system. African Americans may face limited access to service resources that would help address any trauma that may have occurred due to the single-parent family structure or from interaction with the child welfare system. Some respondents also

referred to services that conflicted with their job schedules. One respondent described the need for programs in schools for families to address their child/children's social and emotional needs. Economic hardship for African American single mothers leads to parental stress and children being exposed to adverse childhood experiences such as child abuse and neglect and being placed in foster care (Briar-Lawson et al., 2020; Espinoza et al., 2017; Ray et al., 2021). The feedback loop provided by respondents on their experiences with economic hardship also provides insight on the view of the political agendas of the child welfare agency and total government in addressing the cycle of poverty and reducing poverty among African Americans.

Five respondents made 17 references to the cycle of oppression observed through their experiences with the child welfare system related to interest convergence under CRT. The research captured whether African American single mothers believe the child welfare system promotes accessibility to resources, growth, and stability. Some respondents saw governmental neglect of African American communities due to lack of jobs and the occurrence of crimes as a precursor to child welfare involvement. P5 shared the concerns of neglected African American communities as parents struggle with drug and gang issues and get involved in the child welfare system. Some respondents also observed a link between the child welfare system and the dependence of African Americans on public assistance. Two respondents shared that some African Americans would rather depend on public assistance and continue to live in a cycle of poverty, which results in their involvement in child welfare investigations. P1 shared that "The

welfare system is not motivating because you will sit on it and you see people have children and children just to have a public assistance budget.” P1 believed that welfare system. P1 shared the experience of some children who are not career focused as they want to be like their parents who depend on public assistance. There is a correlation between income and the risk of child welfare involvement among Black or non-Hispanic parents while assessing issues such as parent stress and housing stability (Slack et al., 2017). It is important to address child maltreatment through understanding the resources needed to address parents’ economic and safety needs (Slack et al., 2017). The experiences and observations made by respondents on the possible correlation between public assistance and child welfare involvement allow policymakers to explore cultural or social meanings developed by low-income families and the likely risk of child maltreatment occurrence.

The study provided insight into what African American single mothers believe the perceived social constructs held by child welfare staff. Some respondents reported being talked down to and feeling disrespected and stereotyped by child welfare workers. Delgado and Sefancic (2001) shared concerns on the impact of social constructs such as stereotyping in maintaining the interest of the majority. The feedback loop provided by participants reveals insights of possible constructs child welfare staff have of participants due to race and income that may maintain a potential cycle of involvement of African Americans in the child welfare system. Brair-Lawson et al. (2020) shared that African American families with low incomes that depend on financial benefits from the public

sector need added protection from the vulnerability of child welfare involvement.

Participants' views of the social constructs will help policymakers and researchers further understand and explore the causes and solutions required to address racial inequity in the child welfare system.

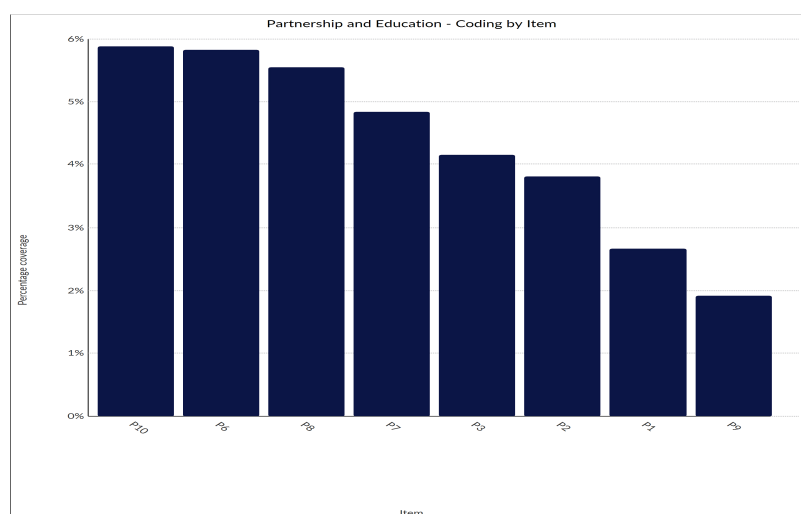
The lack of resources also was connected to respondents' limited understanding of child welfare policies and investigations. The child welfare system is complex. Some respondents have reported incidents from their experiences around not understanding the investigation. Participants' past involvement with the child welfare system ranged from 2-6 years, as observed in Table 3. Some respondents have had court involvement and had to deal with the complex policies and laws of the child welfare system. Table 5 showed that all the participants in the study identified issues or concerns around understanding child welfare investigation, procedure, or policy. Thompson et al. (2019) shared that the complexity of the child welfare system and limited educational resources or training on how it works may result in racial disparity and disproportionality issues. DHHS (2003) provided a report from conducting a study of nine child welfare agencies and found that African Americans are overrepresentation in the child welfare system due to the issue of poverty. The report found that African Americans had to contend with a lack of information on how the child welfare system works and they are also faced with limited resources to advocate for themselves.

A majority of the participants made references (Figure 2) to the need for education, training, and partnership with ACS to reduce the number of African

Americans in the child welfare system. Some respondents recommended training for child welfare specialists to help improve the engagement and the investigative process. Participants' feedback in this study gives them a voice to the issues African Americans face with the child welfare system and the solutions they believe should be specifically targeted to their race and community.

Figure 2

References to Partnership and Education by Participant



This study's findings provide insight around addressing racial disproportionality and disparity through the experiences of African American single mothers who experienced investigations in the past ten years. Researchers may utilize the findings to embark on future research to compare and contrast other states' child welfare investigations and impact on African American communities. Additionally, researchers may further explore the support needed to address the experiences African Americans face with the child welfare system. Policymakers may be able to explore policy reforms

tailored to address the needs of African Americans in their involvement with the child welfare system. Policymakers may also gain further feedback from African Americans or other minority groups on the impact of child welfare investigations or policy.

Limitations of the Study

The study consisted of 10 African American single mothers from the boroughs of Queens and the Bronx, New York. The criteria for the sample required participants to be African American single mothers with closed investigation and service cases with NYC in the past ten years. The sample criteria limited the scope and accessibility to recruit respondents who may only be located based on their geographical location or through knowledge by someone who may know their past involvement with ACS. Places such as churches and community-based organizations provided the opportunity for me to outreach to leaders to gain access through permission to fly recruitment posters and meet with respondents who may fit the research criteria. I selected a sample of 10 African American single mothers to meet saturation for the study as each respondent represents rich information on the child welfare system. I recruited most of the respondents within the borough of Queens due to my limited knowledge of the several geographical locations in the Bronx. I incurred a toll cost of \$35 on each visit to the Bronx, which limited the number of trips made to that borough compared to Queens, which did not require a toll fee. I distributed fliers to local mom-and-pop stores, churches, and community-based organizations in the Bronx and Queens. I received limited responses to the posted fliers from community-based organizations that did not show any interest in

the study, which may have limited the number of potential sample members. I utilized snowball sampling to recruit most of the participants through snowball, and I also randomly recruited a few persons through face-to-face community outreach.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as highlighted in chapter 3, posed a significant challenge for the study. Most community-based organizations were closed and operated remotely, limiting direct recruitment opportunities. Also, speaking with staff from community-based organizations posed a challenge as they worked remotely on different schedules lines due to the pandemic. The limitation experience by remote contact may have impacted the capacity and scope to recruit more participants for the study. The COVID-19 pandemic also changed my initial plan to conduct all face-to-face interviews with participants. The inability to conduct most face-to-face interviews limited the opportunity to gather data by observing the participants in their natural environment. I utilized telephone interviews as the primary data collection process with the opportunity for virtual face-to-face interviews. I conducted seven interviews over the telephone and three face-to-face interviews; however, no participant opted for virtual interviews. Interviews conducted in the community were sometimes met with limited responses as respondents wanted to go back to their regular routines. Telephone interviews had its limitation in allowing for observation and assessment of participants in their natural environment.

The study also experienced limitations in the recruitment of the sample based on the possible poor stigma of ACS. During the recruitment process, several community

organizations refuse to participate as leaders. Some administrative staff reported not having anyone who fit the study's criteria and alluded that their clients came from good backgrounds without any child protection issues. Also, I observed similar attitudes in face-to-face attempts to recruit participants. Some responses towards participating in the study drew negative comments from several mothers who were exhausted with any discussion on ACS due to poor past experiences. I observed my affiliation with ACS as an active employee led to a lack of trust from some mothers who opted out of the study.

Recommendations

The recruitment criteria affected opportunities to gather more data from African American parents' experiences with the child welfare systems. For instance, I did not include parents from nuclear or single-parent fathers in the study. Opening the research criteria may ease the limitations experienced in the recruitment process and add a variety of experiences that is not only limited to single-parent mother household. To also increase the scope of data collection, researchers may explore the other counties in New York to form analytical comparisons with the responses based on the boroughs' data collected.

Face-to-face interviews for future research may be more suitable for this study as it will help build the trust of African Americans in the research process. Face-to-face engagement around recruitment and responsive interviewing will help build confidence in the research process and may lead to more opportunities for African Americans to share their experiences or provide feedback on the child welfare system. Face-to-face

interviews may also help the researcher gauge the responses or feedback provided to manage any stressors or follow-up questions needed during the interview.

The study was limited to two boroughs, namely The Bronx and Queens, limiting opportunities to compare rich information cases. Including all five boroughs in the research may increase the number of participants and provide data representing African Americans' experiences with the child welfare system. Recruiting sample members from all the boroughs may also reduce the tendency to select African Americans from low-income areas and may lead to African Americans affected by the child welfare system who may or may not have financial challenges.

Future Research

The data collected and from the recruitment process of the study highlighted concerns about the poor stigma of ACS. Future research may focus on the factors that led to that viewpoint held by African Americans and what solutions are needed to build trust in the leadership of the child welfare system. Poor views of the child welfare agency may have led to a decrease in trust and involvement in any positive change process. Future studies may explore ACS strategies to reduce racial disparity and disproportionality for African Americans in the child welfare system. Since this study, New York State Legislature passed a State Central Register law (Preponderance of Evidence), which took effect in January 2022. The law was designed to create a fair and higher standard around the indication of child welfare cases and reduce the length of time the State keeps an indicated case. The law was designed to reduce racial disproportionality and disparity as

a result implicit bias. The new law also allows opportunities for employment for parents to work in jobs that may have been restricted due to indication of cases under standard of some credible evidence. Future research may explore the impact of this new law on reducing racial disparity and disproportionality for African Americans in the child welfare system.

There is still a need further research the views or stigma held by others of the child welfare system to explore ways of improving the child welfare experience and trust among all families. The study was confined to the jurisdiction of the New York child welfare system, and as a result, limited generalizations may be made with other states. However, comparative studies may provide insight for future research on experiences with African Americans with the child welfare system and the measures needed to reduce racial disparity and disproportionality.

Other Recommendations

The role of CRT was highlighted in chapter two while exploring the experiences of African American single mothers using PFT. CRT was utilized to understand the relationship between race and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT helps to understand the dynamics of the relationship African Americans have with the child welfare system with equity and equality compared to other ethnic groups. Although utilized in the study, CRT was not the central focus. There is a wide range of opportunities for future research to explore its impact on racial disproportionality and disparity.

Furthermore, there has been a recent discussion on whether CRT should be recognized or utilized in society due to significant changes in the political climate in the USA. CRT has been misrepresented with viewpoints that are inaccurately labeled as anti-white propaganda of the left, and 26 States have passed legislation to limit the teachings of CRT in schools (Blessett & Gaynor, 2021). CRT provides context to race-consciousness and understanding of the role of race and power, addressing racial inequities and intergenerational disparities (Blessett & Gaynor, 2021). It is evident in this research's key findings that CRT should be a part of policymakers' approach to addressing critical issues associated with implicit bias, lack of accessibility to resources, and lack of trust in child welfare workers, as highlighted by most respondents.

The data showed that most respondents showed significant concerns with experiences of implicit bias and equity and equality in the child welfare system, which some believed created a cycle of oppression. African Americans are overrepresented in child welfare and have a history of being marginalized and oppressed. Understanding African Americans' cultural underpinnings and social-economic challenges may lead to tailored reforms that meet cultural and social-economic needs to facilitate communication, education and learning for child protective staff and parents to reduce child welfare involvement. CRT in the context of policy improvement for African Americans is a critical recommendation for future research given the context of changing the political climate in the USA.

Positive Social Change

Implications for Policy Reform and Policy Design

The second research question for the study explores the solutions African American single mothers believe are essential to improving their experiences with the child welfare system. The experiences of African American single mothers provided context to how they are directly impacted by the investigational policies of the child welfare system as a group of color within a single-parent family structure. Chapter 2, PFT was utilized as a foundational theory to analyze feedback from the interviews in Chapter four. From the analysis of the feedback provided, there are three essential solutions observed: the need for community education and partnerships, accessibility to resources, and implicit bias training.

Eight respondents recognized community partnership and education as necessary and made 20 references to it during the interviews held for the study (Table 5). The respondents shared concerns over a lack of involvement in the decision-making processes of the child welfare system and the need for more community outreach programs to build partnership and trust with the child welfare system. As observed in Table 5, seven respondents made references to 14 references to issues associated with trust with the child welfare agency. Community outreach programs may help reduce fear and build confidence in African Americans' participation in the child welfare system. Apart from building trust is the recommendation to further improve the child welfare system for African Americans through education. Understanding the child welfare process is

essential to parents knowing their rights and responsibilities as a parent and may foster opportunities for due process and responsiveness during child welfare investigation.

All respondents shared concerns about understanding child welfare policy and access to resources. Availability of educational resources is also linked to the second recommendation around accessibility to resources. Education may also help build African Americans' knowledge of the child welfare system and processes, as highlighted by Thompson et al., (2019), who identified the struggles faced with understanding the complexity of the child welfare system. The study focused on both access to educational and financial resources as opportunities to improve the experiences of African Americans with the child welfare system. Anyon (2011) highlighted that African Americans lack the resources to protect their children. Making resources accessible to African Americans will help reduce racial disparity and disproportionality with the child welfare system.

The research also revealed concerns of bias as respondents shared concerns over experiences with their interaction with child protective workers and problems of feeling disrespected. The bias concerns through caseworker and parent interaction continue to be a struggle for African Americans (Child Trends & Rynders 2019). Implicit bias training is recommended to improve African American experiences with caseworkers but should build on understanding African Americans as a disadvantaged group through a curriculum of CRT. Owens (2021) identified implicit bias training to help individuals identify behaviors or habits of unconscious biases that can create negative experiences. Owens advocated for implicit bias training to be transformative in which individuals not

only attend a four-hour class but through ongoing accommodation of steps to address old ways of thinking that led to implicit bias. Owens further saw training as a continuous learning process that develops inclusiveness where workers can provide feedback on their own implicit biases. Child welfare agency needs to create a feedback system for both caseworkers and administrators to address their own biases on an ongoing basis. Also vital is the need for families to provide immediate feedback on any biases experienced within an investigation or child welfare staff interaction. Feedback is also essential to positive transformation to reduce implicit bias. In examining implicit bias, Bryne and Tanesini (2015) shared the importance of the ongoing practice of regular training, feedback, and reflection.

Methodological Implications

The study adopted the qualitative approach to collecting data through rich information cases on African American single mothers' experiences with the child welfare system. The qualitative methodology utilized in this study provided insight on issues of bias, lack of resources, and understanding of the child welfare system.

Policymakers may be able to develop policy reforms to address the specific needs of African Americans as they utilize their perspectives to analyze any positive or negative impact of policy. The qualitative analysis of the lived experience of African American single mothers may create opportunities for researchers to explore comparative studies further using internal stakeholders and other minority groups to address racial disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system.

I utilized PFT to create a feedback loop to researchers and policymakers on the viewpoints held on investigational policies in the child welfare system. The use of PFT helped to capture issues around parents' willingness to participate in child abuse investigations based on the views held by African Americans on the goals, power, agenda, and political underpinnings of the child welfare agency. CRT (societal emotional process) was used to help address specific relationships to PFT about African American single mothers as a race and single-parent family structure. The theoretical foundation for the study may be a catalyst in further exploring ways policymakers and administrators may approach reforms around culturally sensitive and implicit bias training to address any negative viewpoints hindering parents' participation in the child welfare system. PFT may lead to positive change in the policy reforms or governance of the child welfare system in meeting African Americans' social and economic needs through the accessibility of resources through education or financial support.

The study's findings revealed issues African Americans face in the child welfare system in NYC around bias, lack of resources, and understanding of a child welfare system in which most respondents held negative views of ACS. The data also showed the solution African Americans believed would help to address racial disparity and disproportionality, which is reflected in Chapter 2. Community partnership and education were identified as top solutions to an understanding and building commitment to reducing African Americans' involvement in the child welfare system. Community partnership and education can create opportunities for policymakers and child welfare administrators to

create positive change through collaborative opportunities with community-based organizations to help improve the relationship with parents across NYC. Furthermore, the study revealed a need for education and training of both caseworkers and parents around understanding child maltreatment and prevention.

Additionally, respondents identified education to parents around child welfare policies, protocol, and procedures as an effective solution. Education may also lead to improvement in the training of caseworkers through ongoing practical discussions around implicit bias and cultural sensitivity training to help workers utilize a non-bias approach through understanding African Americans as a race. Community partnership and education may lead to future studies and exploration around program evaluation and policy reforms needed to improve collaboration and rebuild the trust of families in the child welfare system.

Conclusion

African Americans have a high rate of involvement in the child welfare systems, as discussed throughout the chapters of this study. African Americans also contend with racial disparity and disproportionality in the child welfare system. The challenges of African Americans are compounded with a history of political oppression and racism. The present political climate in the US, also with the recent deaths of Eric Garner, George Floyd, and Brianna Taylor, raises the issues of the injustices faced by African Americans. This study focused on exploring the experiences of African American single mothers with the child welfare system in NYC and gathered the viewpoints on the

solutions they believe will reduce African Americans' involvement in the child welfare system.

The study revealed bias and a lack of resources and understanding of the child welfare system. Parents also indicated the need for community partnership and education to reduce the number of African Americans in the child welfare system. Although the study was confined to respondents in the Bronx and Queens, the data findings indicate more work to be done on all levels of reducing bias and rebuilding parents' trust in the child welfare system. Opportunities for social change exist around comprehensive education plans for parents throughout the city on child welfare investigational policies, procedures, and protocols to help improve their understanding and participation in cases or services.

The study revealed implications for child welfare administrators to build and rebuild trust through bias-free engagement and making resources accessible to African Americans to address their social and economic needs that may likely impact child maltreatment if not met. Finally, policymakers may use the data to implement policy reforms that are targeted to create positive social change in encouraging responsive caseworkers' engagement and participation in procedures, protocols, and services associated with an investigation. The study also set the groundwork for continued future research and exploration on addressing racial disparity and disproportionality of African Americans and other minorities through their lived experiences with the child welfare system.

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Appendix: Interview Guide and Tools

My name is Paul Melbourne, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting qualitative research to explore the experiences of African Americans with the child welfare system. I am seeking your assistance in participating in this research that will be used to help improve policy regarding reducing child abuse among African American communities. Your participation is voluntary, and your name and contact information will be protected and kept confidential in the published research.

Research Questions:

1. What are the experiences of NYC African American single mothers of the child protective policies on their child abuse cases?
2. What are African American single mothers' views on the solutions needed to improve their experiences with the child welfare system?

Interview Questions

Parent Age Range

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old

65-74 years old

75 and older

1. What support you have had as a single parent?
Follow up: How have you been managing in caring for your child/children?
2. In what ways do you think you and your child have been impacted by being in a single parent household?
3. How involved has the father of your child/children been in their or his/her life?
4. What barriers or challenges you have faced if any in meeting your child/children social and financial needs as a single mother?
5. What experiences if any you have had with child protection investigations?
 - a. If positive – explain...
 - b. If negative, explain
6. Describe your experiences with past involvement with
 - a. Child welfare staff
 - b. Child welfare leadership
7. What barriers have you faced in meeting the requirements set forth by child protective staff?

Follow up: What challenges you have had if any in understanding child welfare procedures of policy.

Follow up: Were you satisfied with the way you were treated during the child protective investigation.

- a. If yes, explain
 - b. If no, explain
8. Why do you think there is a high number of African American children involved in the child welfare system?
 9. Tell me about your experiences with engaging child protective staff around any challenges faced with the child welfare system?
 10. What supports were provided to you during your child welfare investigation?
 11. Describe your willingness to participate with child welfare services?
Follow up: What your experiences with the services you were involved in?
 12. What support do you believe is needed in the African American community to reduce the number of children involved in child welfare?
Follow up: How competent you believe the child welfare agency is in addressing the needs of African Americans?
 13. What ideas will you suggest improving your experience with the child welfare system?