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Well-Being Among Foster Parents of Children With a History of Sexual Abuse

Jelenny Marquez
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Jelenny Marquez

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Review Committee

Dr. Silvia Bigatti, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Kimberly McCann, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Rhonda Bohs, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2023

Abstract

Well-Being Among Foster Parents of Children With a History of Sexual Abuse

by

Jelenny Marquez

MPA, Bellevue University, 2010

MS, Florida International University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

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Abstract

There are over half a million children and adolescents living in foster care in the United States, and many of them endure frequent disruptions to their placements. Disruptions are more common among children with a history of sexual abuse. The disruption of placement increases the likelihood of undesirable outcomes for both the children and their foster parents. Foster parents who are willing to offer a home that is safe and stable for a child in the foster care system are more important than ever. This qualitative study explored foster parents' experiences of well-being after having fostered children with a history of sexual abuse. The positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments theory of well-being grounded this study and guided the development of the interview questions. This study included a sample of nine foster parents from the state of Florida who had experience fostering a child with a documented history of sexual abuse. Findings suggested that the unique challenges and pressures associated with foster parenting, such as the emotional burden of caring for children who have experienced sexual trauma, can have significant impacts on the well-being of foster parents. This in turn can influence the stability and quality of care provided to the foster children. Working to improve foster parents' well-being may be essential to keeping foster parents motivated to foster, potentially decreasing foster parent frustrations and foster child placement disruption. Findings may be use by foster agencies for positive social change to improve the lives of foster families.

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Dedication

To the omnipotent force that fills every moment of our existence, I first and foremost offer my gratitude to God, who has guided my steps throughout this journey, provided me strength, and instilled me with the resilience to persevere. To my shining lights, Lucy, Trevor, Lila, and Alex, who inspire me each day with their curiosity and vigor. You, my children, are the stars in my sky, each unique and beautiful. This work is a testament to the importance of learning and growing, which I hope to pass on to you all. To my rock, my beloved wife Katherine, who has stood by my side, unwavering, through the highs and lows of this venture. Your patience, understanding, and unfaltering belief in me have been the pillars supporting this endeavor. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine. To my parents, who instilled in me the importance of hard work, perseverance, and dedication. Your support and love have been my foundation, guiding me to this very moment. I dedicate this dissertation to you all, for you are the cornerstones of my life and have been instrumental in shaping the path that led to this achievement. May it be known that this work is not an end but a profound beginning. A preface to the next chapter of my life, filled with curiosity and the will to continue this journey of discovery. As I stand at this juncture, I am not only reminded of how far I've come but also inspired by the prospects of the journey that lies ahead. Each word, each page, each chapter represents a part of this beautiful voyage of life. Here's to more learning, growth, and achievement. Thank you all, from the depths of my heart, for being part of my journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Children placed in foster care settings are expected to adapt, cope, and function as part of a family unit that must learn how to navigate through the child's unique circumstances and difficult experiences. The children bring a plethora of unique behavioral, developmental, and cognitive challenges into the dynamic of the family systems into which they are incorporated. These issues are compounded when the children interact with one another. The integration process is often met with tension and misunderstanding about the foster parent's responsibilities to provide the children with the care necessary to restore function in family dynamics (Frederico et al., 2017). All of this may be even more difficult when the foster child has a history of sexual abuse. Foster parenting a child who has been sexually abused can be stressful and challenging (Blythe et al., 2013).

This study focused on the experiences of foster parents fostering children with a history of sexual abuse. The information acquired may provide suggestions for best practices, particularly relational responses and intervention strategies that might be included into a foster care program to assist foster parents in coping with difficult circumstances. Chapter 1 begins with an introduction to the foster care system. An outline of questions the study attempts to answer will be introduced, as well as the theoretical framework, and the nature of the study. The scope of the study is defined through the acknowledgment of identifiable assumptions, boundaries, and limitations. In closing, potential contributions of the study are presented.

Background

The foster care system was established in the middle of the 19th century to provide care for children and youths who did not have a stable family environment (Hacsi, 1995). It has developed over the years as more children who are in the custody of the government have been put into settings that are the least restrictive and most homelike (Chateauneuf et al., 2021). Most foster homes are run by adults who are not related to the children they care for and who obtain their licenses after completing fundamental foster parent training. Such topics may include phases of child development, what to do in case of an emergency, general experiences of foster children, how to navigate the foster care system, and the needs of foster children. After obtaining their license, foster parents take on the role of surrogate parents for the child that is placed in their care for the duration of the time that the child cannot return home in a safe manner, until the child is adopted, the placement is disrupted, or the child reaches an age where they no longer require parental care. If the child is adopted, the placement is disrupted, or the child reaches an age where they no longer require parental care, the foster parents can return the child to their biological parents (Chateauneuf et al., 2021).

In contrast to around 18 to 22% of the general population, it is estimated that up to 80% of children living in foster care struggle with major mental health concerns (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). Broken family relationships, inconsistent and inadequate access to mental health services, and the overprescription of psychotropic medications are all factors that contribute to the mental and behavioral health of children and youth who are in foster care. Other contributing factors include a

history of complex trauma, frequently changing situations and transitions, frequently changing situations, and transitions (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). Many factors contribute to the failure of up to 95% of all foster care placements (Concordia St. Paul, 2021; Fratto, 2016).

Foster care exists to improve the lives and well-being of the children in its care. However, after they have completed their training, licensed foster parents are at times unprepared for the children who are placed in their care (McLean et al., 2020). One reason for the lack of preparation in foster care parenting training is a gap in knowledge relating to the well-being of foster parents (Griffiths et al., 2021). If a foster parent feels supported and their well-being improves, the chances of the foster parent continuing to foster improve significantly. To be licensed as a foster parent, prospective foster parents must first complete a series of rigorous requirements (Griffiths et al., 2021). Specifically in Florida, after the Florida Department of Children and Families has given its approval and determined that an individual is "fit for duty," there is minimal training beyond the fundamental licensing requirements and standards (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).

In most cases, those who offer foster care are given a guidebook that includes a rundown of the laws and regulations as well as the duties that are required of them (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). The guidebook explains in detail what is expected of those providing foster care services. There are no criteria or best practices that can be followed to make a foster home a safe and supportive environment for children who may have come from difficult or dangerous home settings. However,

there are guidelines that describe behaviors that are not acceptable for foster parents to exhibit, as well as lists of regulatory requirements (such as the need for appropriate space for foster child to sleep and maintain personal items, smoke alarms, requirements for school enrollment, etc.; Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). The dynamics of providing care for children in foster care are precarious at best.

A dismal picture of the present situation of the foster care system emerges when one considers the obstacles inherent in the act of fostering children in conjunction with the failings of the system itself (Adams et al., 2018). It is not easy to achieve the primary objective of foster care, which is to provide children who are in need of a home a secure and loving environment in which they may flourish.

Problem Statement

Foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse are more likely to report a reduction in overall well-being and ultimately leave the foster care system (Miller et al., 2019). These foster parents tend to report an increased level of difficulty when addressing problematic behavior (Salerno et al., 2020), and the often-challenging behaviors that sexually abused children may exhibit seem to increase in frequency and intensity in foster care, resulting in significant stress for foster parents (McKeough et al., 2017). Many foster parents experience distress when they are unsure of how to proceed when they encounter children exhibiting problematic or sexualized behavior in their home (Griffiths et al., 2016). Given how important foster parents are to the foster system, their experience of well-being needs to be explored, understood, and

attended to, yet as Miller et al. (2019) noted, there is a paucity of research focused on the wellbeing of these parents.

Nature of the Study

To address the research question in this qualitative study, the research design was a generic qualitative approach. A generic qualitative approach best suited this study because it helped me investigate foster parents' beliefs and experiences about their well-being when fostering children with a history of sexual abuse (see Percy et al., 2015). To address the research question in this qualitative study, the specific research design used is a nonprobability sampling approach. Purposive sampling was used because the information to be obtained focused on a particular group of the population.

Research Question

The research question that directed this study was as follows: What is the experience of well-being among foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of well-being among foster parents of children with a history of sexual abuse. It is possible that by recognizing the factors that lead some to continue to foster and others to stop, changes can be made and/or best practices can be established (both relationally and behaviorally) that might help in parenting foster children.

Conceptual Framework

The positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievements (PERMA) theory of well-being developed by Seligman (2011) grounded this study and guided the development of the interview questions. The PERMA framework shows promise as a reliable tool for assessing and enhancing well-being (McCormack & Issaakidis, 2018). There are five building blocks that enable well-being and subjective happiness according to this theory (Seligman, 2018). These building blocks suggest foster parenting can be a rewarding experience that can positively affect well-being. The logical connection between the PERMA theory of well-being and the nature of the study is that in this study, the focus was on understanding well-being, as defined by Seligman, among this population.

Positive emotions play a large and vital role in the lives of foster parents and foster children (Randle et al., 2016). When developing programs that aid in recruiting and retaining quality foster parents, Randle et al. (2016) asserted that promoting positive emotions in program advertising motivated individuals to volunteer. Engagement is an important component in promoting well-being in foster parents with the potential for improving caregiver participation in children's health needs (Dorsey et al., 2014). Nurturing relationships is positively related to happiness, a factor that is vital when developing the well-being of foster parents (Leathers et al., 2019). Griffiths et al. (2021) indicated that perceptions of accomplishment and personal impact were the primary predictors of overall role satisfaction in fostering. Overall role satisfaction promotes the well-being of foster parents (Leake et al., 2019).

Operational Definitions

Foster care: A short-term service consisting of placing a child in a foster family home, group facility, or semi-independent living arrangement (WIN Family Services, 2014).

Foster care placement: An approved family home, a group home setting, or a residential treatment facility where a child will reside 24 hours a day and receive care, nurturing, and support (WIN Family Services, 2014).

Foster child: A child up to age 18 or 21 (depending on state policy) placed in the care of a local department of social services by either a voluntary placement agreement with the birth family, adoptive family, legal guardian, or by a court commitment order (WIN Family Services, 2014).

Foster parent: A relative or nonrelative adult who is approved by the local department of social services to protect, nurture, educate, and care for a child (WIN Family Services, 2014).

Well-being: According to Seligman (2011), well-being involves five elements, which include (a) positive emotion: happiness and life satisfaction; (b) engagement: total absorption in a task; (c) relationships: human connection; (d) meaning: belonging to and serving something bigger than the self; and (e) accomplishment: achievement often pursued for its own sake.

Assumptions

Assumptions included that the participants consented to participate, which indicated a complete understanding of the concepts that were presented as part of this

study. Another assumption was that the participants consented to participate because they desired to share their experiences involving fostering children with a history of sexual abuse and therefore would be thorough and honest in their responses.

Limitations

The major limitation in this qualitative study related to the sensitive topic of discussing fostering children with a history of sexual abuse. The foster parents' shared experiences of self-report called for appropriate strategies to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is built by sharing the significant findings and themes with participants as member checking to confirm an authentic representation of the participants' stories in the final report (Burkholder et al., 2016). In qualitative research, the primary instrument for information collection is the researcher (Babbie, 2017). In semistructured interviews, the researcher turns into a part of the instrument by using prior knowledge to lead them as they make adjustments to the way they capture facts while conducting the interviews (Babbie, 2017). Because of the researcher's preconceptions and prejudices, the interpretation of the events that are related by the participants can be different (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). As a result, the researcher needs to keep an open mind about the perspectives of the participants throughout the interviews and while analyzing the data (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). A final limitation of this study was that it relied fully on foster parent self-report. It is possible that foster parents may have inaccurately reported their experiences based on their own biases and social desirability, particularly on their experiences parenting children with a history of sexual abuse.

Transferability was supported as thick descriptive details included in the final case study report, illustrating the multiple dimensions to the participants' stories and how they intersect (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Accuracy and reliability were ensured in the data by maintaining detailed audit trails of the analysis process (see Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Reflexive notes throughout different stages of the research development process were important to maintain to acknowledge and reflect upon biases stemming from my past experiences that could have influenced the study results (see Heng, 2019).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it provides a deeper understanding of the experience of well-being among foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse. This information may help the child welfare system find effective ways to support foster parents to maintain their well-being or to develop it when they are struggling. Foster parents who experience well-being stay longer in their role of fostering, leading to the well-being of foster children. This improved understanding could be incorporated into foster parenting education and training programs. An understanding of how foster parents are able to experience well-being could also inform the education and training provided to this population and could inform the development of programs and policies directed toward enhancing well-being in the foster parenting population.

The social change implications of this study are that if the experience of well-being in foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse can be better understood, further research may be conducted to find ways the child welfare

system can support foster parents to maintain their well-being or develop it when they are struggling. Foster parents who experience well-being stay longer in their role of fostering, leading to the well-being of foster children (McCormack & Issaakidis, 2018). This improved understanding could be incorporated into foster parenting education and training programs. An understanding of how foster parents are able to experience well-being could inform the education and training provided to this population and could inform the development of programs and policies directed toward enhancing well-being in the foster parenting population.

Summary and Reflections

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of well-being among foster parents of children with a history of sexual abuse. While there has been a plethora of research looking at the foster care system overall, there has been little data looking at the well-being of foster parents who foster children with a history of sexual abuse. Study findings have indicated there is a noticeable gap in the existing body of research about the effect on the foster parents' well-being related to the problematic behaviors exhibited by the children in their care (Griffiths et al., 2016; McKeough et al., 2017).

Foster parents' experience of well-being was explored as a possible reason to foster or not foster a child with a documented history of sexual abuse. Foster parents who continue to provide foster care may exhibit a high level of well-being. There are also factors that may contribute to a high level of well-being among foster parents, such as family support, parenting style, proper training, and education on issues of foster caring

(Piel et al., 2017). Chapter 2 presents an extensive literature review of the concepts studied, including information about the foster care system in general and in the state of Florida, as well as an explanation of the conceptual framework guiding the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In the state of Florida in 2020, there were more than 20,000 children in the state foster care system (Florida Department of Children and Families [FDCF], 2021). In Florida, children remain in foster care on average for over 1.5 years, and 5% of these children have languished there for 5 or more years (FDCF, 2021). In 2020, there were only 4,561 certified foster homes to serve Florida's entire foster care population (Florida's Children First, n.d.).

The child welfare system has struggled with successful care planning where foster families can adequately manage the challenges associated with fostering children with a history of abuse (Saarnik, 2021). The experiences of foster children and exposure to abuse may affect the well-being of foster parents (Griffiths et al., 2021). Research has indicated that foster parent's well-being is ignored by the foster care system (Griffiths et al., 2021). The present study focused on the experience of well-being among foster parents of children with a history of sexual abuse. Chapter 2 includes the literature search, a description of the theoretical framework, a rigorous review of the most recent literature on well-being in the foster parent population, the connection between foster parent well-being and fostering children with a history of sexual abuse, and a summary of major themes in existing literature that informed this study.

Literature Search Strategy

The search for primary sources to support this study included ProQuest, PsycINFO, Academic Search Premier, ERIC, SAGE journals, Taylor and Francis,

Science Direct, SocIndex, and Google Scholar. The search began with limiters to sort by publication date and was limited to review articles and empirical studies with full text available online in peer-reviewed scholarly journals published within the past 5 years.

The search resulted in 1,288 records related to the following search terms: *foster care, foster care system, foster care program, PERMA or theory of well-being, PERMA or model of well-being, parent or foster parents, sexual abuse or sexual trauma, foster parents or foster families or foster home* published from 2017–2022. Of the 1,288 records, 112 were associated with the key words, *foster parents*. Additional search terms applied to identify peer-reviewed sources included *foster parent, kinship care, out of home placement, child welfare system, sexual assault, complex trauma, self-care, and subjective happiness*. Cross-referencing ensured an exhaustive review of the major themes of this study.

Conceptual Framework

The PERMA model of well-being served as a guide to understand well-being among foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse. The PERMA model of well-being includes five building blocks that enable personal well-being: (a) positive emotion, (b) engagement, (c) positive relationships, (d) meaning, and (e) accomplishment (Seligman, 2018).

Positive emotion is defined by Seligman as experiencing three kinds of happiness: pleasure and gratification, embodiment of strengths and virtues, and meaning and virtue (as cited in Butler et al., 2020). Positive emotion is linked to success and well-being in a variety of areas of life, including social, physical, occupational, and psychological health

(Alexander et al., 2021). Experiencing positive emotion has a significant impact on many other parts of life, including the other elements of the PERMA model. Positive emotion is an important goal for most individuals (Livingstone & Srivastava, 2012), and central to the pursuit of happiness are the ways in which individuals seek out and maintain positive experiences (Alexander et al., 2021). A person may experience positive emotions to attain well-being (Livingstone & Srivastava, 2012).

The PERMA model's second element is engagement, which refers to the experience of becoming highly consumed or engrossed in a task, activity, or emotion (Butler et al., 2020). Seligman (2018) defined engagement as an instrumental component of well-being, and the degree of engagement has a significant influence on how individuals perceive the world around them. The act of engagement comprises cognitive, psychological, and behavioral components (Eryilmaz et al., 2021). Engagement is also understood as a process of inclusive participation that supports strategies for action (Fredricks et al., 2016). Understanding how engagement can be facilitated in various interest groups is an important endeavor in optimizing well-being (Kenning & Visser, 2021).

Positive relationships, the third element of the PERMA model, involves an individual's interactions with their family, partners, friends, coworkers, community, work colleagues, and the public (Positive Psychology Center, n.d.). Positive relationships have been theorized to enhance physical, intellectual, and social skills that support adaptation and long-term survival (Seligman, 2018). Positive relationships serve to strengthen bonds and connections (Positive Psychology Center, n.d.). Well-being often increases when

spending time with friends and family (McLellan, 2019). Cultivating positive relationships can help one live longer and develop meaningful connections, which can provide one with a sense of purpose and belonging (Wissing, 2014). Positive relationships translate to improved social integration or one's degree of assimilation into social networks (Appau et al., 2019). Measures of social integration were researched by Appau et al. (2019) in the context of social support based on variables such as satisfaction with the support received and the nature and quality of well-being. Social integration has long been associated with good mental health (Matthews et al., 2015) and can serve as an explanatory factor in understanding well-being.

Seligman (2018) defined meaning as a sense of belonging to and/or service to something larger than the self. As the fourth element of the PERMA model, meaning is at the heart of human experience (Aglozo et al., 2021). Humans can only make sense of their existence through meaning (Chater & Loewenstein, 2016). Meaning is associated with a feeling of purpose, which makes life valuable. A strong sense of meaning is necessary for optimal human development (Demirbas-Çelik, 2018). During major hardship or misfortune, having a purpose in life helps individuals focus on what matters most to them. Searching for meaning and purpose seems to improve resiliency to vulnerabilities and challenges in life (Schotanus-Dijkstra et al., 2016). Additionally, resilience and finding purpose in life are important measures of psychological health and well-being (Lasota & Mróz, 2021).

Accomplishment is the fifth element of the PERMA model, and it encapsulates mastery, potential, achievement, and competence (Seligman, 2018). Working for and

achieving objectives, mastering an undertaking, and having self-motivation all contribute to a sense of accomplishment. There is a strong connection between accomplishment and positive emotions that often leads to experiences of pride and self-actualization (McLellan, 2019). Achievement is linked to achieving goals with an internal motivation to improve, which leads to thriving and well-being (Narvaez, 2018).

Literature Review

Foster Parents

Background Characteristics

In terms of demographic characteristics, most foster families are White (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2022). While nationwide-data are not available, state-specific data suggest that Black foster families represent only about 6.5% of foster families (Rabun, 2021). Sixty-three percent of foster parents are married, but nearly 30% of foster families are headed by a single woman (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2022). In the United States, over 2,600 same-sex couples have been licensed to foster an estimated 3,400 foster children (Williams Institute, 2022), and although some states, such as Kansas and Oklahoma, prohibit or severely curtail lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, asexual, and plus foster families, other states like Connecticut have programs in place specifically to encourage gay and lesbian foster families (Haigh, 2018). Seventy percent of foster parents have education beyond high school (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2022), compared to 86% of all families with children (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018). Foster families are more likely to have a disabled adult living

in the home; about one fourth of all foster children are living with a fostering adult with a disability (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018).

Only 31% of foster parents have full-time jobs, and only 56% of heads of homes put in at least 35 hours per week, but 60% of all families with children have at least one working adult in the family (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018). Foster families have a mean income nearly 31% lower than the mean income for all households with children (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018). Foster children are much more likely to live in households that have an income of less than \$20,000 a year and are much less likely to live in households with an income greater than \$100,000 a year, compared to other children (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018).

According to the findings of Cooley et al. (2017), the most prevalent motivations for fostering a child are the desire to increase the size of one's family, the realization that children need stable homes, and the desire to save the life of a kid who has been neglected or mistreated. Others foster because they cannot conceive biological children (Stene et al., 2020). Individuals with greater knowledge of the child welfare system and the needs of children in foster care were more likely to become foster parents (Friedman, 2019). Knowing and engaging with other foster parents accounted for 47.5% of foster parents' reasons for fostering (Friedman, 2019).

Services Provided by Foster Parents

Foster parents provide a variety of services critical to the functioning of the child welfare system. The demanding responsibilities include caring for children's often complex physical and mental health needs, coordinating services, supporting children's

connections with birth families, and responding to court hearings relating to placement, adoption, and family reunification (Cooley et al., 2017; Gribble & Blythe, 2022; Rhodes et al., 2003). As it relates to well-being, foster parents were found to develop positive relationships with the foster children in their care and often advocated for them in child-welfare and court systems (Shdaimah & Rosen, 2020). Of all the foster children who are eventually adopted, 53% are adopted by former foster parents (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).

Characteristics of Successful Foster Parents

Much research has identified characteristics of foster parents who successfully engage in long-term fostering. In regard to demographics, foster parents are more likely to remain fostering if they are single, older, in an urban residing, and are willing to take multiple placements that require higher levels of care (Crum, 2010; Hanlon et al., 2021; McGuire et al., 2018). Stress coping skills and sympathetic traits (Van Holen et al., 2019), adaptability (Saarnik, 2021), openness, solid social support networks, stability, maturity, humor, empathy, and a love of children are among the attributes of effective foster parents (AdoptUSKids, n.d.; Bailey, 2015). Foster parents with a prosocial attitude have stronger bonds to their foster children (Gouveia et al., 2021). In a cluster analysis of skills and characteristics that lead to good foster parenting, Cooley et al. (2017) developed clusters of skills that good foster parents in his study possessed. Foster parents in Cooley et al.'s research suggested that it was critical to show foster children compassion, love, dedication, and patience. The researchers also found that effective placements need parents who understand foster children to build trust between them and

the youngsters. They also have to be open-minded, be flexible, have a sense of humor, knowledge, and a huge heart, be prepared for difficulties, be ready to go outside of their comfort zone, and be willing to make changes as required.

Foster parents also claimed that they needed self-awareness to trust their experience while also knowing their own talents and boundaries, such as knowing how many foster children they could manage and having acceptable expectations of the foster children. They discussed the importance of communication skills and a regular routine in dealing with aggressive behavior and maintaining a stable family. Finally, they just needed more room for the children.

The North American Council on Adoptable Children (2017) identified nine characteristics of successful foster parents, which included the following:

1. Able to find happiness with small steps toward improvement.
2. Refuse to be rejected by their child and can delay gratification of parental needs.
3. Are tolerant of their own ambivalence and/or strong negative feelings.
4. Maintain parental role flexibility.
5. Have a systems view of their family.
6. Take charge of their parental role.
7. Insist on developing an immediate relationship with the child.
8. Practice self-care and use humor.
9. Operate in an open versus closed family system. (p. 10).

Motivation to Foster Children

Foster parents are motivated by a variety of factors, generally classified as either being intrinsic or extrinsic (Thoman et al., 2019). Extrinsic motivation is aimed at satisfying some material need or external pressure or granted reward or benefit (Thoman et al., 2019). Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, comes from within oneself; it is internalized in the individual's value system (Thoman et al., 2019). Motivation that stems from an individual's innate, genuine interest and will is intrinsic motivation (Utomo et al., 2019).

Individuals who become foster parents report doing so for a wide range of reasons, including the idea of an obligation to society, wanting to make a difference in a child's life, religious reasons, viewing fostering as the first step in adoption, a desire to increase the number of individuals in one's family, as well as wanting to increase one's income (Delgado et al., 2015). Most individuals claim to have intrinsic and altruistic motivations for fostering (Chateaufneuf et al., 2021; Gouveia et al., 2021; Migliorini et al., 2018). Vanderfaeillie et al. (2018) divided intrinsic motivations into three categories, including (a) child-centered, (b) self-centered, and (c) society-centered. Child-centered intrinsic motivations include wanting to love and provide a good home for a child (Vanderfaeillie et al., 2018), rescuing children from harm (Adams et al., 2018; Gouveia et al., 2021), and saving children from having to live in institutions (Cooley et al., 2017). Foster parents also reported wanting to help children with special needs, while others indicated they simply had enough time and space to be foster parents (Gouveia et al., 2021).

While foster parents mention altruism and a love for children as what motivates them, some parents are also motivated by the salary they receive from the state child welfare system (Cooley et al., 2017). In the state of Florida, foster parents earn approximately \$429 per foster child per month (Mellon, 2019). Foster parenting does not pay as well as other lines of work, such as fast-food workers who earn an average of \$1,809 per month (Davi et al., 2021). Extrinsic motivation is only a small part of the picture in foster parenting. However, there persists a misconception that many individuals foster children for financial reasons. Davi et al. (2021) found that the desire to increase the family's income played a role in the decision to foster for some families. However, most research does not validate that claim (Adams et al., 2018; D'Amato & Brownlee, 2021; Delgado et al., 2015; Randle et al., 2018).

In the state of Florida, financial benefit, improving the image of fostering, and filling the home after grown child leaves were found to be equally important in deciding to become a foster parent (Davi et al., 2021). In a Romanian study, 61% of respondents reported an intrinsic motivation for choosing work as a foster parent, while 39% were extrinsically motivated (Neagoe et al., 2019). It is worth noting that even parents who may initially decide to become foster parents for extrinsic reasons eventually discover intrinsic values such for personal motivation and knowing the success parents had parenting their own children (Friedman, 2019).

Foster parents also discover the intrinsic value in fostering, which includes protecting and helping children in need (Gouveia et al., 2021). Parents also fostered because they were considered adoption and thought that fostering provided a trial with

less commitment than adoption (Cooley et al., 2017). Some foster parents were motivated to foster because they were experiencing the empty-nest syndrome (Rae, 2018) or because they had biological children and wanted to increase their family size (Gouveia et al., 2021). However, self-oriented reasons were also related to worse outcomes. For example, foster parents' reasons as wanting companionship or wanting to be loved by a child realized fewer placements (Gouveia et al., 2021). Miller et al. (2019) found that motivations derived from the foster parents' needs are correlated with more placement disruptions.

Finally, wanting to fulfill one's obligation to society is the root of what researchers call society-oriented intrinsic motivation (Gouveia et al., 2021). Society-oriented intrinsic motivation includes religious motivations or beliefs toward fostering (Cooley et al., 2017). Day et al. (2018) conducted semistructured interviews regarding factors that promoted successful foster parenting and found that strong religious faith and church involvement were strong motivators in being a foster parent.

Foster Parenting Style

Parenting style has a profound influence on a parent's well-being, child development, and the interaction between parent and child. Effective parenting styles provide the foundations for developing trust and enhancing well-being (Letourneau et al., 2019; Spies & Duschinsky, 2021). It is no different for foster parents, who have the additional challenge of parenting foster children who have experienced abuse, abandonment, and have externalizing and internalizing behavior problems.

Foster parenting style has an impact on the behavior problems of foster children. Foster children tend to do best when their foster parents employ authoritative parenting (Adkins et al., 2018). When foster parents set limits and explain the rationale behind them, foster children exhibit fewer behavioral problems (Quarmby et al., 2019). This is contrasted with foster parents who either tolerate inappropriate child behavior (permissive parenting) or are overly severe and demanding (authoritarian parenting), in both cases, the child is more likely to show behavior problems (Konijn et al., 2019; Mendis et al., 2018).

Parenting styles based on the use of harsh punishments, inconsistent discipline, and rigid control are associated with more internalizing problems for the child; children raised in homes with an absence of positive parenting have an increased risk of externalizing behaviors (Adkins et al., 2018). It has also been shown that negative parenting practices have a greater impact on behavior problems than simply the absence of a positive relationship (West et al., 2021). Rigid and aggressive parenting styles have been associated with foster parents discontinuing their duty of care (Kertesz et al., 2022).

Authoritarian parenting has been found to explain 18% of the variance in externalizing problems (Cheung et al., 2011). In a regression model, Salas et al. (2016) showed that an authoritarian parenting style was a predictor of more behavioral problems in the foster child. There is a demonstrated association between authoritarian or rigid parenting and problematic behavior in children and adolescents (Lanina et al., 2021). The relationship was confirmed by researchers who focus specifically on the foster care setting (Goemans et al., 2018).

Problem parenting has a recursive relationship with problem foster child behavior (Salas et al., 2016). Problem parenting leads to problem behavior, which then leads to parents being less supportive and more negative and hostile in their parenting approach (Vanderfaeillie et al., 2018). From the perspective of internalizing behaviors by the child, these have been shown to create insecurity among foster parents, leading to harsher and less consistent punishments (Degener et al., 2021). However, authoritative, and sensitive parenting alone may not always decrease the sometimes persistent behavior problems seen in foster children with trauma histories (Ciff et al., 2015).

Harmful and dysfunctional disciplining strategies can be ameliorated by foster parent training programs (Ciff et al., 2015). Parenting interventions are positively related to improving sensitive parenting and decreasing dysfunctional discipline (West et al., 2021). In a study conducted by Farmer and Lippold (2016), foster parents were asked about the most effective means of disciplining their foster children; the most effective approaches were said to be removing privileges (37.6%) and discussing/talking about the problem behavior (29%).

Parental monitoring is an important feature of parenting style. Parents' supervision of children's time and activities is associated with problem behaviors and delinquency in youth (Keijsers, 2016). However, research is split on whether sustained parental monitoring predicts less problem behavior or more problem behavior (Laird & Zeringue, 2019). There is some evidence of a bidirectional relationship between problem behaviors and parental monitoring, in that problem behaviors influence parental monitoring (Lionetti et al., 2019). Being in out-of-home care and having negative

perceptions of parental monitoring led to a decrease in well-being among foster parents (LoBraico et al., 2020). Foster children's problem behavior decreased when foster parents were more engaged, taught rules, and guided their behavior (West et al., 2021). Foster parents who are more sensitive, empathetic, understanding, and communicative help raise foster children that show fewer problems (Adkins et al., 2018).

Fostering Children With a History of Sexual Abuse

Foster care can be a challenging intervention and questions can be raised pertaining to its efficacy. Although the literature on placement breakdown has made significant progress during the last years, empirical knowledge regarding fostering children who have experienced sexual abuse or assault remains scant (Vanderfaeillie et al., 2018). Vanderfaeillie's et al. (2018) study aimed at investigating prevalence and precursors of breakdowns in long-term foster care, the duration of placement before breakdown, and the association of child and placement characteristics with sexual abuse. A total of 580 case files of foster children were analyzed with a coding scheme designed for the study (Vanderfaeillie et al., 2018). After 6 years, 398 placements terminated with 169 placements that broke down, and 229 placements that ended positively (Vanderfaeillie et al., 2018).

In Vanderfaeillie's et al.'s (2018) study, placements broke down mainly because of behavioral problems of the foster child, foster parents' parenting problems, and conflicts between birth and foster parents. Foster children with behavioral problems, older foster children, foster children denied treatment, and foster children in care because of sexual abuse were more at risk of placement breakdown (Vanderfaeillie et al., 2018).

Assessing these factors is important when evaluating the appropriateness of a family foster care placement (Konijn et al., 2019).

Children who have experienced sexual abuse and are placed in out of home care experience significant challenges in finding permanency compared with children removed for any other reason (Gouveia et al., 2021). Griffiths et al. (2016) sought to explore the factors that affect permanency in rural areas for children with a history of sexual abuse in foster care. The results of the research noted that many foster parents experience distress when they are unsure of how to proceed when they encounter children or youth exhibiting problematic or sexualized behavior in their home.

Prentky et al. (2014) presented quantitative research that explored predictors of sexually inappropriate behaviors of boys in a welfare sample. The study's conceptual basis rested on cases of sexual behavior problems of children within the foster care system compared to the rest of the population. Researchers found that instability in placement was associated with this problem behavior and also with factors that could mitigate the sexually inappropriate behavior, such as self-control, responsibility and adjustment (Prentky et al., 2014).

Octoman et al. (2015) created an online survey to determine problematic behaviors and their extent within a population of children placed in foster care due to prior abuse. The authors were able to categorize them into different components and ranges of behavior. They created these different strata of behavior based on cognitive difficulties, followed by sexual or risky behaviors, then aggressive behaviors, and finally, anxiety-based behaviors. Researchers created online surveys based on clinical measures

that were already substantiated before determining the extent of the problematic behaviors. The survey included a sample of 201 foster children between the ages of 4 and 12. Four separate profiles of behaviors that caregivers regarded as problematic were produced using principal component analysis. The components included cognitive issues, risky sexual or other behaviors, aggressive, domineering, and violent behaviors, and symptoms of anxiousness. These variables explained over 60% of the variance in problematic behaviors.

Foster Parent's Well-Being

Various domains in childhood development are affected by complex trauma and are particularly challenging when placing children in foster homes (Schoemaker et al., 2020). Schoemaker et al. (2020) discovered that one domain in particular, attachment, determines the level of permanency in foster placements and that foster parents are vital to understanding this dynamic. The researchers discovered that foster parents do their best when they perceive they are valued as important partners (Schoemaker et al., 2020). The researchers suggested that for children with a history of trauma, statewide assessment programs should focus on strengthening efforts to support foster parents in their role (Schoemaker et al., 2020). To promote trauma-informed professional supports and services to maltreated children, it is imperative that researchers explore foster parents' knowledge of child trauma (Miller et al., 2018). Miller et al. (2018) exposed information on the gap in literature related to foster parents' knowledge of child trauma.

Miller et al. (2019) explored the need to bring attention to foster parents' well-being and self-care while addressing foster parent stressors. They proposed a conceptual

model of foster parent self-care. Some of the factors described in the research conducted by Miller et al. (2019) that affect foster parents' well-being included: (a) children presenting with a history of abuse, (b) lack of family support, and (c) difficulty in communication with child welfare system. Foster parents reported a reduction in overall well-being and self-care when affected by these stressors. The researchers proposed a conceptual model that sought to expand the notion of self-care beyond a set of practices to an understanding of self-care practices as the result of internal and external factors that contribute to or inhibit foster parent self-care. The authors make recommendations for foster parents, researchers, and agencies interested in improving the health and well-being of foster parents (Miller et al., 2019).

Sharda et al. (2019) focused on the role of external support that a foster parent needs to develop well-being. Social support has been found to reduce stress in foster parents and promote well-being (Choi et al., 2016). Foster parents confront problems that affect their well-being, including child behavior problems, role changes, challenging family dynamics, and financial strain (Sharda et al., 2019). Griffiths et al. (2021) noted that the overall stress of being a foster parent probably influenced overall well-being more than any other individual factor. Well-being factors include: (a) life satisfaction, (b) health-related quality of life, (c) health status, (d) depression, (e) psychological distress, and (f) emotional strain (Sharda et al., 2019).

Well-being of the foster parent is important throughout all stages of the placement, including when the child is removed from the home either to be placed with their birth family or adopted to another family (Newquist et al., 2020). The

placement of a foster child in the foster care system can affect the well-being of everyone affected by the event (Hebert et al., 2013; Urquhart, 1989; Whiting & Huber, 2007). Newquist et al. (2020) found that foster parents felt sad when foster children were removed from the home, which affected their well-being. To increase their well-being, foster parents actively found ways to keep the child “present” after the child was placed back with family (White et al., 2021).

Summary

Many children in need of foster care services have been exposed to traumatic events, such as sexual abuse (Vanderfaellie’s et al., 2018). Foster parents do everything they can to ease the child’s difficulties and concerns while improving the child’s well-being. Foster parents work hard to establish a connection with the child, meet the child’s needs, and provide a safe environment. Research showed that for most foster parents, fostering is a worthwhile endeavor, but it is taxing on their well-being (Gouveia et al., 2021).

There is a case for exploring the experiences of well-being foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse. When well-being outcomes are achieved, children in foster care are provided with the resources they need to succeed in school and maintain their physical and emotional health, and by extension, foster parents succeed in their parenting when their well-being is met. Through this literature review of extant studies, it is clear that there is a gap in research relating to the experiences of well-being in the foster parent population. It is important for researchers to consider the well-

being of foster parents, not only for the benefit of the children in their care, but also for the sake of the foster parents' well-being (Miller et al., 2019).

The primary goal of the child welfare system has always been to improve the lives of the children in their care. The children's well-being is significantly impacted by the foster parents' well-being. Well-being and positive functioning are considered essential elements for developing positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment between the foster parent(s) and the child(ren) (Griffiths et al., 2021). Foster parents who have the resources, support, and knowledge to meet the children's needs are better able to do so through supporting their own well-being (Leontopoulou, 2020).

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In this qualitative study, the experience of well-being of foster parents who are fostering a child with a history of sexual abuse was explored through a generic qualitative approach. A generic qualitative approach is appropriate for studying what people think about a topic or issue (Percy et al., 2015). A generic qualitative approach best suited this study because it helped me investigate foster parents' beliefs and experiences about their well-being when fostering children with a history of sexual abuse.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology implemented for completing this study. A description of the research design and rationale, which involves research questions, concepts, and research alignment, will be the first step in outlining Chapter 3. Then, I present my role as a researcher, including positionality, managing bias, and addressing ethical concerns. In the methodology section, the procedures for sampling, interviewing, and data analysis are explained in detail, among others used as the study is conducted. Next, issues of trustworthiness and the ethical procedures are presented to ensure the participants are respected and protected. Finally, Chapter 3 closes with a summary of the main points covered.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Question

To guide this study, the following research question was proposed: What is the experience of well-being among foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse?

Design and Rationale

This qualitative study involved exploring the experience of well-being among foster parents who are fostering children with a history of sexual abuse. The goal was to explore the experience of well-being of foster parents and find ways the child welfare system can support foster parents to maintain their well-being or to develop it when they are struggling. The study findings may expand on the knowledge of how foster parents who experience well-being stay longer in their role of fostering, leading to the well-being of foster children. This improved understanding may be incorporated into foster parenting education and training programs.

For this study, a generic qualitative approach was used. A generic qualitative approach is a descriptive approach aiming at understanding how humans create sense of a phenomena or a situation, depending on what would work best in obtaining answers for the topics under examination (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Researchers who use the generic qualitative approach typically analyze a process comparable to what may be anticipated in grounded theory without aiming to create a substantive theory (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Researchers whose studies do not fit into a specific known methodology may find the generic approach to qualitative research appealing due to its ability to rely on the qualities of existing methods while keeping the flexibility that makes generic approaches desirable. A generic qualitative approach was best suited for this study because this approach allowed an exploration of how well-being was experienced by foster parents. As a result of gathering information from various resources, it is possible

to have a more thorough comprehension of the circumstances surrounding a specific case (Donnelly et al., 2013); this is referred to as data triangulation.

Role of the Researcher

In my role as a qualitative researcher, I used a generic qualitative approach to conduct in-depth interviews with multiple foster parents to learn about their experiences with well-being. Conducting a qualitative study required active involvement as a researcher in the research as the primary instrument for collecting, categorizing, analyzing and reporting the data (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a researcher, I remained self-aware throughout the study and was conscientious of my beliefs and value system in every part of the process.

I became a part of the instrument in semistructured interviews, allowing my knowledge and ability to guide me as I made adjustments to capture details during the interview process (see Babbie, 2017). My preconceived notions and biases may have influenced how I interpreted the participants' stories, which might have led to different conclusions (see Babbie, 2017). Therefore, I remained sensitive to the participants' perspectives both during the interviews as well as during data analysis. Researchers are less likely to be affected by their own bias if they incorporate an iterative analytical procedure and member check-backs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Population

The population of interest for this study was foster parents living in Florida, male and female, who have experienced fostering at least one child who had been sexually abused and who was between the ages of 1 month to 17 years of age. They must have fostered the child for at least 6 months. Such a requirement was deemed necessary as 6 months is a significant enough amount of time for foster parents to have gained knowledge of issues and problems as foster parents. Foster parents from various demographic backgrounds (racial and gender identity, income, education, employment, living situation and location, socioeconomic status) were included. Heterogeneity in participant samples may contribute to the breadth and depth of experiences or perceptions of a phenomena, which may increase the findings' capacity to be generalized to other contexts (Babbie, 2017).

Participant selection was based on the following criteria: (a) over the age of 18, (b) licensed by a licensing fostering agency in the state of Florida, (c) had been a foster parent for at least 6 months, and (d) had fostered a child(ren) between the ages of 1 month and 17 years of age. The exclusion criteria included participants who had not been approved by the state authority organizations to foster children in the state of Florida or participants who had not fostered a child with a known or documented history of sexual abuse.

Sampling Strategy

Because the data collected were targeted toward a subset of the population, a purposive sampling was employed. Upon approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), social media advertisements, such as Facebook and Instagram, were deployed for recruitment. The advertisement provided general details about the study (see Appendix A).

Sample Size

To determine how large of a sample is needed, inductive qualitative researchers employ the concept of saturation (Hennink et al., 2017). When it comes to data collection and coding, reaching the point of saturation means getting to a point where there is informational redundancy or repetitious codes (Hennink et al., 2017). Gentles et al. (2015) compiled a table of appropriate sample sizes based on past research studies and other qualitative research methods. The generic qualitative approach was not included; however, other descriptive qualitative studies, such as phenomenology and case studies, were included. The suggested samples sizes can be used to estimate an appropriate sample size for qualitative studies.

According to Gentles et al. (2015), the number of interviews or cases required to reach saturation for descriptive phenomenology was roughly 12 participants. After reviewing the results of 25 in-depth interviews, Hennink et al. (2017) determined the appropriate sample size and level of saturation for qualitative research was approximately nine interviews. Therefore, the goal for participant recruitment in my study ranged from

eight to 12 participants, with the target sample size being 10 or until data saturation was achieved.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment Procedures

The advertisement sent through social media included a link to an intake form in Survey Monkey that screened for potential participants (see Mampane & Omidire, 2018). The screening form assessed eligibility, collected contact information, and included the informed consent for participant review. To qualify for the study, foster parents must have been fostering for at least 6 months children between the ages of 1 month and 17 years of age with a known or documented history of sexual abuse. The foster parents must also have been licensed by a licensing fostering agency in the state of Florida. Potential participants who completed the screening form were contacted by email (the preference noted in the screening form) to set up the interview date and time and format (phone, Zoom, etc.; (see Appendix B).

The advertisements noted that participants would receive compensation for enrolling in the study in the amount of \$15 dollars in the form of a gift card. All participants received this compensation. This decision was made due to issues of recruitment feasibility given the sensitivity of the topic. It is thought that compensation would be necessary in that foster parents may not enroll due to fear of sharing information that may keep future foster parents from agreeing to foster children with a documented history of sexual abuse.

Participation Procedure

The interviews were all completed in English, and the informed consent materials were provided in English. The interviews began by asking the potential participants the study inclusion criteria questions again to confirm eligibility. When potential participants met the inclusion criteria, the participants were informed that the interview would be audio-recorded, and then they consented to record the interview. The informed consent form was reviewed with the participant to obtain verbal consent. A hard copy of the consent form was sent to the participants through email following the interview. Participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria were thanked for their interest in the study, and an explanation was given about why they did not meet the inclusion criteria.

Once the participant was determined to meet inclusion criteria, I began the interview with an introduction that included a brief description of the study, the approximate timeframe of the interview, and an explanation that the interview was being audio-recorded by using my computer audio recording integrated tool. The informed consent form was reviewed with each prior to beginning the interview. It was important to ask participants if they had any questions prior to commencing. The participants were asked for their agreement to the informed consent to continue to participate. Participants who agreed to continue to participate were asked the questions on the demographic form (Appendix C) and then proceeded with the interview questions (Appendix D).

Instrumentation

The demographic form and semistructured interview questions for this research study were used for data collection. In qualitative research, establishing the content

validity of new measures requires asking questions that provide answers to the study issue and collecting the participants' responses properly and accurately (Howson, 2013). The semistructured interview questions were guided by the principles of well-being. A comprehensive review of literature related to the topic of fostering well-being was conducted as part of the design process to inform the development of the interview questions and to provide historical context on the issue.

Researchers often find that in-depth interviews are the most fruitful way to learn about participants' life experiences (Howson, 2013). This is especially true when researchers are looking to collect stories that provide context to human experience. The interview was conducted using a format that is standardized and open-ended, with questions that are crafted in advance of the interview. Every participant was asked the same set of questions. This framework also makes it possible to ask in-depth questions to go deeper and have more extensive discussions (Howson, 2013).

The interview questions asked participants to reflect upon and describe their experiences. Probing questions were used when necessary to pull evocative responses from the participants (Appendix D).

Data Collection

The participants were interviewed one time throughout the data collection process. There are disadvantages and advantages to using telephone or video as the method for collecting the interview data. Some research studies have concluded that telephone interviews could increase disclosure of sensitive information from study participants (Drabble et al., 2016). This is because individuals feel more privacy over the

phone and may feel at ease in their own environment (Drabble et al., 2016). Other advantages of using telephone interviews include greater access to participants in a variety of geographical locations (Drabble et al., 2016).

For each interview, the participants were reminded of their right to choose to stop being in the study at any time. The participants were informed about anonymity, that their information would remain confidential, and that the information provided by participants would be kept in a password protected computer and locked file cabinet for any paper documentation. Only the dissertation committee and I would have access to the study data.

I transcribed the interviews, and the participants were asked via email to perform a participation validation or member check of the transcribed interview. The reliability and trustworthiness of qualitative data are both improved by the use of member checks (Babbie, 2017; Birt et al., 2016). Member checking encompasses several different methods, including (a) giving the interview transcript to participants to review, (b) asking the participants to look at the transcripts with interpreted data from the interview, (c) or giving them analyzed data along with quotes from the interview to support the analyzed data (Birt et al., 2016). A copy of their transcribed interview was emailed to each participant.

In addition to member checking, reflexivity was used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data. Qualitative researchers use a technique called reflexivity to reduce the effects of researcher bias in their studies (Lemon & Hayes, 2020; Stahl & King, 2020). Researchers can become more aware of how their professional and personal

experiences might impact the data collection, coding of the data, analysis of the data, and interpretation of the data via the process of reflexivity (Dodgson, 2019). Researchers maintain a reflective notebook during the entire study process to capture their thoughts and emotions regarding the interviews, as well as the first and second cycle coding decisions. This process allows them to address the issue of reflexivity. This assists in determining the various perspectives and levels of subjectivity (Dodgson, 2019).

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis was completed simultaneously within the process of data collection for each participant. This was repeated for each individual case, and then for the cases in total using cross-case synthesis (see Mello, 2021). During the interviews, the first level of the analysis was completed. Key themes that emerged from the theories in the literature were used to probe the interviewees with in-depth questions to obtain further information about the themes.

The analysis phase allowed for exploration of parallels between the interviewees' stories and previously published works of literature. Careful and repeated reading of the transcripts produced from each of the interviews helped identify distinctiveness, similarities, and patterns. Noting variations helped to organize the data into categories and draw emerging themes across the cases. Conducting within-case data analyses followed by cross-case data analyses immersed me in the data. This was accomplished by conducting within-case data analyses followed by cross-case data analyses (see Mello, 2021).

Because qualitative coding is not linear, but rather cyclical in nature, qualitative researchers employ the first and second cycles to code and recode data (Howson, 2013). Qualitative researchers are interested in exploring individuals' interpretations of their experiences, as well as individuals' world perspectives, conceptions, and the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences (Kahlke, 2014). Because qualitative research is based on an inductive methodology, some of the types of coding employed include open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Babbie, 2017). The open coding technique belongs to the first cycle of coding, whereas the axial and selective coding methods belong to the second cycle (Saldaña, 2016).

The first and second cycle coding techniques are the fundamental building blocks of the process of carrying out data analysis. It is also necessary to identify and explain the method of analysis used while conducting the data analysis. Thematic analysis is a method that may be used to examine qualitative information (Percy et al., 2015). It is advised in generic qualitative research to use this form of analysis.

Inductive analysis (IA) is a type of thematic analysis that is led by the data rather than by predetermined categories (Babbie, 2017; Percy et al., 2015). In IA, the researcher suspends preconceptions and examines the facts to determine the meanings of the participants (Percy et al., 2015). The data are examined for recurring themes and trends. After identifying the themes, they are compiled into a composite synthesis with the intent of interpreting their meanings to answer the research question (Percy et al., 2015).

The 12-step process outlined by Percy et al. (2015) is commonly used to perform an inductive analysis on qualitative data. The process of IA according to Percy et al.

(2015) entails: (a) reviewing the data, (b) highlighting data that are relevant to the research question, (c) removing unrelated data, (d) coding the data, (e) clustering related codes to identify patterns, (f) labeling and describing patterns and connecting data to those patterns, (g) looking for patterns of patterns and combining related patterns into themes, (h) arranging themes into a matrix that includes the supporting patterns and data codes, (i) writing a detailed abstract analysis of each theme that addresses the scope and substance of the study, (j) conducting the above steps for each participant's data, (k) combining the patterns and themes from all of the participants' data, and (l) synthesizing the themes together to create a composite synthesis of the data regarding the research question (Percy et al., 2015).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is equivalent to the validity and rigor of quantitative research. Rigor refers to the caliber of the study process and its design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Similar to the concept of validity in quantitative research, trustworthiness refers to the procedures qualitative researchers use to ensure their results are an accurate reflection of the participants' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reliability include trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Credibility

The degree of trust that may be placed in the researcher's interpretation and depiction of the participants' experiences and perspectives is referred to as credibility (Connelly, 2016; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The researcher's credibility is impacted by

how they address complications in the data or trends that are difficult to explain.

Researchers may increase their credibility by using participant validation procedures such as member checking, reflexivity, and triangulation (Connelly, 2016).

Member checking, also known as participant validation, improves credibility by having participants evaluate their interviews and confirm that the researcher correctly recorded and expressed their perspectives and experiences (Birt et al., 2016; Connelly, 2016).

According to McInnes et al. (2017), participant validation is the most important technique to build credibility, since participants judge if their experiences are effectively reflected in the replies to the interview questions. The research participants will be invited to examine their transcribed interviews for correctness and to provide comments on whether they feel their responses were appropriately recorded (Birt et al., 2016).

Reflexivity will enhance the data's trustworthiness. Reflexivity is a technique used by qualitative researchers to reduce researcher bias (Lemon & Hayes, 2020; Stahl & King, 2020). The reflexivity process allows researchers to be aware of how their professional and personal experiences might influence data collecting, data coding, data analysis, and data interpretation. To overcome reflexivity, researchers maintain a reflective notebook throughout the study process to record their thoughts and emotions regarding the interviews as well as their first and second cycle coding judgments. This aids in determining the researcher's views and subjectivity (Lemon & Hayes, 2020; Stahl & King, 2020).

Another strategy to enhance the credibility of the study results is triangulation. Triangulation is the process of developing themes and drawing conclusions from many sources of information (Donnelly et al., 2013). Triangulation also requires obtaining many viewpoints and looking at a conclusion from multiple angles (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Using past research, literature, and theory throughout the research process to assist to draw conclusions about the data and themes is known as method triangulation (Babbie, 2017). Triangulation will entail embracing different sources of data and applying theory to underpin my results. Previous research studies, literature, and the PERMA theory of well-being will be used to assist in drawing analytic conclusions about the phenomena being examined.

Transferability

The degree to which data may be applied to various contexts or situations is referred to as transferability (Daniel, 2019). An audit trail is used by the researcher to enhance transferability. Audit trails include detailed explanations of the data analysis process, methodological notes, and a list of all papers and records generated and updated throughout the investigation (Daniel, 2019). Keeping an audit trail raises the likelihood that readers will be able to connect to the results and create analogies to other situations (Babbie, 2017; Daniel, 2019).

To promote transferability, logs and diaries were maintained that provided a full explanation of the study method. Notes on the interview procedure are important to keep, the first and second cycle methodologies and coding judgments, as well as the study's setting. Another method for improving transferability is to use purposeful sampling

(Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Participants in purposeful sampling are chosen based on their aptitude to assist in answering the study topic. Participants who have a connection to the research issue might offer more detailed information about the study inquiry (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Various demographic factors, such as participant age, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and educational level, indicate a broader variety of situations and experiences (Nelson, 2017). A greater variety of situations may increase the participants' depth of interest and experiences (Burkholder et al., 2016). This improves transferability by allowing more individuals with diverse life experiences to give data that may be used to answer the study question (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). To improve transferability, foster parents from diverse demographic characteristics will be included.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which other researchers can confirm the study's findings and the amount to which the data correctly represents participants' experiences (Burkholder et al., 2016). Confirmability may be achieved by admitting the unavoidable biases that arise owing to the subjectivity of qualitative research. This may be accomplished by maintaining a reflective notebook or taking notes. Transparency regarding the researcher's thinking processes, decisions, and experiences may assist readers with understanding how the researcher arrived at their findings and interpretations of the data (Percy et al., 2015). Confirmability may also be improved by using audit trails, triangulation, and member verification (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003;

Birt et al., 2016). Audit trails, triangulation, and member verification in the way outlined in earlier sections will increase confirmability (Birt et al., 2016).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of methodologies used, which allows a third party to track the source of data and outcomes back to research participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This was achieved by explicitly detailing the processes required to perform the planned study to assist demonstrate reliability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) and keeping a complete audit trail of the procedures involved to keep track of crucial choices and discoveries (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

Respect for individuals requires that participants be of sound mind to be regarded competent of examining the research plan, weighing the risks, and providing informed permission indicating their willingness to engage in a study (Shore, 2006). This is especially important when doing research on vulnerable groups such as young children, the elderly, and the sick, who are immediately regarded to be at a greater risk of injury. Because of the nature of this research, participants may have disclosed information that might be seen as endangering their connection with their foster child, foster child's family, and foster licensing organizations.

To minimize this, participants learned ahead of time of the research strategy, of their ability to decline participation in the study, and of any potential hazards of physical, mental, or emotional suffering. Participants were advised of their ability to withdraw from the process at any moment throughout the procedure. This study's participants were

all adults above the age of 18 and did not include any vulnerable demographics. As a result, the Walden University IRB accepted this research as presenting only a minimal risk to the participants (IRB# 05-02-23-1039329).

Summary

In Chapter 3, the research design for the generic qualitative study was discussed. The methodology, research design and rationale guiding the study, the role of the researcher including its impact on the study were presented. The procedures for participant recruitment and data collection, as well as the process for analysis of the data collected were included. Issues of trustworthiness and ethical concerns related to the research were also outlined. In Chapter 4 to follow, a review of the actual recruitment and data collection process followed by the results of the study will be discussed.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of well-being among foster parents of children with a history of sexual abuse. Findings from this study may inform the child welfare system on effective ways to support foster parents to maintain their well-being or to develop it when they are struggling. In this study, qualitative, semistructured interviews consisting of 11 open-ended questions were conducted with nine foster parents regarding their experiences of well-being. The overarching research question used to guide this study was as follows: What is the experience of well-being among foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse?

In this chapter, I provide an in-depth account of the participant interviews, the setting, characteristics of those interviewed, and how data were gathered and examined. Subsequently, I illustrate the use of strategies to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as outlined in chapter 3. Finally, I present a summary of the findings from this study on how the foster parents in this study experience well-being after fostering a child(ren) with a history of sexual abuse.

Setting

I completed this study after the first year of the global pandemic caused by the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19. The pandemic's impacts made people more dependent on technology for social interactions; hence, I performed all research remotely to observe maximum precautions for the safety of the participants and myself. No in-

person interactions took place for this study. All communications with participants occurred using email and phone calls.

All participants met the requirements for being included in the study, which were as follows: (a) over the age of 18, (b) licensed by a licensing fostering agency in the state of Florida, (c) had been a foster parent for at least 6 months, (d) had fostered a child(ren) between the ages of 1 month and 17 years of age, and (e) have or had fostered children with a known or documented history of sexual abuse.

Recruitment began on May 2, 2023 after obtaining Walden IRB approval (05-02-23-1039329) to complete the study. All recruitment occurred via Facebook and Instagram social media posts, which required participants to access the internet, those specific pages, and email. Participants initially reached out via email to which I replied with the approved invitation to participate in the study along with the informed consent form. Once participants reviewed and responded with their consent, I continued addressing their questions by phone.

Virtual interviews occurred from May 5, 2023, to May 12, 2023. The nine interviews were conducted separately using my computer audio recording integrated tool, which required each participant to have access to appropriate devices (i.e., phone, computer, or tablet), access to email, and the ability to use all of these to take part in the study. None of the participants experienced technical difficulties while accessing email to complete informed consent or when completing the interview via phone.

Demographics of the Participants

The population for this study was comprised of nine foster parents who agreed to be interviewed by telephone for this study. In accordance with the inclusion criterion described in Chapter 3, all participants were over the age of 18, had been licensed by a licensing fostering agency in the state of Florida, had been a foster parent for at least 6 months, had fostered a child(ren) between the ages of 1 month and 17 years of age, and have or had fostered children with a known or documented history of sexual abuse.

The participants are referred to using pseudonyms throughout the study. The format is "P" followed by the participant number. Participant 1, for example, is referred to as P1. The ages of the participants ranged from 38 years old to 61 years old, with a mean age of 45 years. As shown in Table 1, seven participants were female and two were male. Participants' annual household incomes ranged from between \$35,000 and \$49,999 (three participants), \$50,000 and \$74,999 (four participants), to \$75,000 and \$99,999 (two participants). Four participants were married, one was single, three were divorced, and one was widowed. Three participants were White, three were Latino, and three were African American. Levels of education ranged from High School Diploma or equivalent (two participants), some college education (two participants), Associate degree (three participants), to graduate school (two participants). Five participants described their religious affiliation as Christian, three identified as Catholic, and one reported no religious affiliation. Table 1 depicts relevant demographic information for each participant. Two participants described their employment status as homemaker, four participants reported working full-time, while two reported working part-time, and one

reported being retired. The type of residence reported by the participants were home owner (five participants), home renter (two participants), and apartment (two participants).

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital status	Education	Race/ethnicity	Work history	Income	Type of residence
P1	F	43	Married	Some college	White	Homemaker	\$35,000 to \$49,999	Home owner
P2	F	38	Married	Associate degree	Latino	Full-time	\$50,000 to \$74,999	Home renter
P3	F	45	Divorced	Master's Degree	Latino	Full-Time	\$50,000 to \$74,999	Home owner
P4	M	56	Married	Associate Degree	Black	Retired	\$75,000 to \$99,999	Home owner
P5	F	39	Divorced	High school diploma	White	Part-time	\$35,000 to \$49,999	Home renter
P6	M	61	Widowed	Master's degree	White	Part-time	\$35,000 to \$49,999	Home owner
P7	F	40	Single	Some college	Black.	Full-Time	\$50,000 to \$74,999	Apartment
P8	F	38	Divorced	Associate Degree	Black	Full-Time	\$50,000 to \$74,999	Apartment
P9	F	46	Married	High school diploma	Latino	Homemaker	\$75,000 to \$99,999	Home owner

Data Collection

Upon receipt of Walden University's IRB approval to conduct the research, I commenced implementation of my approved research plan in accordance with the IRB approved methods. I began recruitment of participants by posting on social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram. I used my personal pages as well as public pages and professional groups that were relevant to the population I was seeking to interview, foster parents in the state of Florida.

The potential participants completed the intake form accessed through Survey Monkey, which screened them for inclusion in the study. The potential participants responded with their contact information, and I reached out to each individual via email. I responded to each individual with the invitation and informed consent email. I had 11 individuals express interest in participating in the study, with 10 responding affirmatively to the invitation to participate and informed consent email. One of the individuals did not meet the study criteria and was disqualified from participation. The individual was in the process of getting licensed in the state of Florida but was licensed in Georgia and relocated to Florida with the foster child; thus, the individual did not meet the criteria of being licensed as a foster parent in the state of Florida at the time of the study.

With the remaining nine individuals, I reviewed the nature of the study via telephone and was able to schedule a date and time for the interviews. It took approximately 1 week to agree on a time for the interviews. I conducted the interviews over a period of 8 days. I asked the foster parents 11 interview questions (see Appendix D). During the interviews, there were follow-up questions and prompts that allowed for

the development of rich, in-depth meanings from the information given by the foster parents. All questions were centered on the key elements contained in the research question highlighting the foster parents' experience of well-being.

I digitally recorded and then transcribed each interview using the computer audio recording integrated tool with an integrated transcriber that recorded audio and transcription of each interview simultaneously for use. Each interview was successfully completed using audio recording and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The interviews began with a scripted introduction to the research, followed by informed consent confirmation. Next, demographic questions were covered, followed by 11 interview questions. Additionally, I kept self-reflective notes, and recorded data that I deemed relevant. After completing each interview, I used Microsoft 365 Premium Transcribe feature to convert the voice recording for transcription. From there, I exported the mp3 voice recordings of the interviews to a password-protected external hard drive.

During the data collection process and subsequent dissertation development process, I was the only person who had access to the data. All audio files, informed consents, and transcripts were kept in a locked cabinet in my home. I assigned a password to all instruments used to store all data.

Data Analysis

Generic qualitative research is a research approach that is used to explore and understand the meanings, perspectives, experiences, and attitudes of individuals or groups in a particular context (Kahlke, 2014). Five themes and 12 subthemes emerged from the interviews, which allowed me to gain a greater insight of the foster parents'

experience of well-being. The themes and subthemes were interpreted using inductive data analysis processes of coding, categorizing, grouping, and regrouping the data. The themes and subthemes that were identified through the data analysis procedures addressed the research question and therefore created a foundation for the presentation of the key research findings presented in this study.

I focused on coding significant passages related to the research questions within the transcripts that highlighted the essence of the participants' experiences with well-being. The process of analysis continued with a second run for which I applied well-being coding to highlight the experiences, attitudes, and beliefs associated with the participants' experiences with well-being as reflected within their responses. I completed this second run of coding analysis for each interview (within-case) and then again across responses (cross-case), which provided a robust set of codes, categories, and summaries of the data to identify the themes and draw conclusions for the results over the remainder of the analysis process.

Throughout the analysis process, I focused on reading and re-reading the foster parents' stories through the lenses of the experience of well-being. The interpretation and analysis of the participant descriptions of their experiences with well-being was considered from their experiences of fostering children with a history of sexual abuse. The lenses of well-being provided a framework for drawing themes that reflected the complexity of the experiences shared and presented using descriptive details to share the foster parents' stories in these results. Tables 2 and 3 list the themes and subthemes

derived from the coding and categories drawn from the data analysis as included in the narrative report.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes Derived From Analytical Coding, Categorizing, and Grouping

Theme	Subtheme
Emotional impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma: The emotional impact of fostering children who have experienced sexual abuse and the feelings elicited from this experience. • Attachment: The challenges of forming attachments, establishing trust, develop belonging. • Healthy relationship with the child: Nurturing, healing, and growth.
Support networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional support: The importance of professional support, including therapy and guidance from social workers or other professionals. • Peer support: The role of peer support and networks of other foster parents or support groups in providing emotional support, practical guidance, and a sense of community.
Parenting and coping strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies: Building routines, establishing boundaries, and creating a safe and supportive environment. • Coping: To manage the emotional impact of fostering children who have experienced sexual abuse.
Training and preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized training such as trauma-informed care and managing challenging behaviors. • Support before and during the fostering process, including clear communication, realistic expectations, and access to resources.
Impact on family and personal life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption to the family routine and financial implications. • Difficulty meeting personal needs. • Family and cultural concerns intensify commitment.

Table 3*Saturation Grid*

Theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9
Emotional impact	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Support networks	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parenting and coping strategies	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Training and preparation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Impact on family and personal life	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I conducted a generic qualitative study to gain a deeper understanding of complex issues in the context of the participants' real-life experiences with well-being through the interpretation of rich data drawn from in-depth interviews and relevant documents. Large amounts of descriptive data were produced for analysis and interpretation by asking the same 11 questions of every participant during semistructured interviews.

Being a novice researcher, I recognized the potential impact of my biases on the collection and analysis of data throughout the entire process (see Mampane & Omidire, 2018). My preconceived notions and biases could have influenced how I interpreted the participants' stories, which might have led to different conclusions (see Babbie, 2017). Therefore, I remained sensitive to the participants' perspectives both during the interviews as well as during data analysis. Additionally, I practiced strict reflexive note taking to remain self-aware of how my world views influenced the interpretation of data and the construction of the final results (see Whiting, 2008).

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the trustworthiness and believability of the findings, interpretations, and conclusions generated from the study (Birt et al., 2016). It is an important aspect of qualitative research as it aims to establish the reliability and validity of the research process and outcomes. Credibility involves demonstrating that the research findings accurately reflect the experiences and perspectives of the participants and that the interpretations and conclusions are well-grounded in the data collected (Daniel, 2019).

To establish credibility, triangulation and member checking was used. I examined each participants' interview separately. This allowed me to use multiple informants who contributed differing points of view and experiences of well-being as a means to establish the credibility of the data. Member checks were also used to verify and, in some cases, clarify my understanding of the foster parents' experience with well-being. Member check involved sending the participants a copy of the transcripts for them to review and confirm veracity.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the findings, interpretations, and conclusions of a study can be applicable or transferable to other contexts or settings beyond the specific research context. It addresses the question of whether the findings can be relevant and meaningful to similar groups of people, situations, or contexts (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). To establish transferability, I provided a clear and in-depth description of the foster parents' reports of their experience

of well-being and the context they used to help make meaning of the experience. The detailed descriptions provided in this study enable readers to assess the transferability of the findings.

Dependability

To ensure dependability, an audit trail was employed, maintaining a comprehensive record of interview transcripts and a journal. Within the journal, I documented my thoughts and the processes undertaken during data analysis. Furthermore, the journal contains detailed information regarding the identification of patterns and the development of themes that emerged from the data.

The completion of this study followed all necessary steps approved by the IRB. To provide a comprehensive framework for other researchers and reviewers, I included a detailed description of the data collection and analysis procedures in this chapter, following the guidelines outlined by Korstjens and Moser (2018). Additionally, to ensure transparency and maintain a record of my thoughts and decisions throughout the study, I used voice-to-text and email methods to create a digital archive. For the data analysis phase, I maintained a meticulous audit trail consisting of notes and memos linked to specific codes. This approach allowed for a time-stamped record of the analysis process, critical decisions, and the reported findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability is attained when the conclusions and interpretations presented in this study can be verified by the participants, ensuring that they are solely derived from the collected data and not influenced by personal viewpoints (Birt et al., 2016). To ensure

confirmability, reflexivity was employed throughout the study. I maintained a self-reflective journal from the outset, documenting my experiences and responses in an accurate manner. This practice allowed me to continually be aware of any personal assumptions or biases that I might have had, thereby ensuring that they did not unduly influence the data analysis process.

Results

After completing the data analysis process, I organized my interpretations of the participant's responses into five major themes. Five major themes and 12 subthemes were interpreted using inductive data analysis processes of coding, categorizing, grouping, and regrouping the data. The themes presented in this study reflect my interpretation of the participants' perspectives in relation to the central research question. To capture the essence of their voices, I constructed a descriptive report that incorporates concise summaries and syntheses. Throughout the narrative, I integrated extensive excerpts from the interview transcripts to preserve the foster parents' voices within the ideas conveyed. The narrative report includes a table that outlines the themes and subthemes derived from the coding and categories generated during the data analysis process.

The sections to follow present descriptions of the five major themes drawn from the analysis. The subthemes are also explained under each theme, including short interpretive narrations embedded within the most relevant and salient excerpts of the participant response data to support the conclusions presented in the summary.

Theme 1: Emotional Impact

The first theme that emerged from the data is that all the foster parents in the study viewed their experience of well-being as emotional impact that derived from both trauma and attachment. Foster parenting is a challenging and emotionally demanding job, particularly when fostering children who have experienced sexual abuse (Octoman et al., 2015). Foster parents who take on this responsibility must be prepared to provide a safe and supportive environment for these children while also managing their own emotional reactions to the trauma that the children have experienced. In this section, participants shared how they experienced well-being in relation to the emotional impact when fostering children with a history of sexual abuse.

Subtheme: Trauma Experienced by the Foster Child Impacts Emotional Well-Being

Participants who cared for children who experienced sexual trauma reported experiencing a range of emotions, including stress, anxiety, depression, and frustration that impacted their experience of well-being. P3 said she often felt overwhelmed by the emotional and behavioral challenges that the child presented and often struggled to establish a trusting relationship with the child. P3 felt “frustrated and sad because I didn’t know how to lean into his emotional needs because I was neglecting mine too.”

P1 explained that “the emotional impact of caring for a child who has experienced sexual trauma was challenging when I have experienced trauma myself.” Having to prioritize on her emotional needs was difficult. P1 explained,

I was triggered by the child's behaviors and struggled to maintain my own emotional stability. Sometimes you have to put your emotions aside because the

child needs your attention right away. Many of his emotional outbursts ended up affecting my emotions. I'm a stay-at-home parent and I was drowning in the emotional toll it was taking to parent him. No one could understand my distress.

P5 and P7 said fostering a child with a history of sexual abuse elicited feelings of fear, sadness, anger, and helplessness. P5 said, "I was afraid of not being able to provide her with the care and support she needed." P7 said she worried about the child's emotional well-being, and feared she may not be able to "help the child overcome the trauma he had experienced." Foster parents may also fear that the child's behaviors may escalate, and that they may not be able to manage the child's challenging behaviors. P9 elaborated on this fear:

I feared for my own safety and the safety of my family. The children we have fostered who came to us with an experience of sexual abuse acted out; they had behavioral issues that put themselves and us at risk and we feared for our physical and emotional safety. Of course, this made me sad. I just didn't know how to connect. It's like a feeling of helplessness because you don't know what to do.

P2 experienced feelings of frustration and guilt that impacted her well-being when she felt like she was unable to alleviate the child's trauma symptoms: "There were definitely many moments the frustration was so bad it affected my well-being and I felt guilty for not being able to understand where all these behaviors were coming from." Strong feelings of hopelessness were felt by P4 as he was navigating fostering with a child who had experienced sexual abuse:

At first, I thought I knew what I was doing, you see, I worked in the correctional system at the jail as a lieutenant and I thought I had everything figured out.

Nothing prepared me for the level of attention required of this child who I thought was so difficult to work with. That was it; I was just hopeless, but I wasn't gonna give up.

Many of the foster parents interviewed discussed examples of how they experienced anger as emotional impact when they cared for a foster child. There are many potential reasons why foster parents may experience anger when caring for a foster child. For example, P4 expressed feeling a mixture of hopelessness and anger that affected his well-being: "I think I was frustrated with the child's behavior and struggled to cope with the demands of parenting a child with a history of trauma. My wife kept I was angry all the time." P4 explained; however, that the anger was toward the child's birth parents and the child welfare system for the circumstances that led to the child being in foster care.

Subtheme: Forming Attachments to Develop a Sense of Trust, Belonging, and Satisfaction

Forming attachments with children who have experienced sexual abuse can be challenging to the foster parent and their experience of well-being. P6, a widowed 61-year-old foster parent, said, "Forming attachments with children who have experienced sexual abuse is emotionally draining." P6 said he experienced vicarious trauma, which he says he experienced when he was exposed to the emotional trauma of the child he fostered in the past:

I couldn't form an attachment with her. I felt isolated and unsupported in my efforts to form an attachment with her. I recognized it was a lonely experience because I had lost my wife about a year before. Attachment was important for my own well-being because it would have offered a sense of belonging and satisfaction.

P2 said she struggled with trust issues and forming an attachment with the child. P2 explained, "As a foster parent, it is important to establish trust with the child by being consistent, reliable, and honest. I think this was difficult because I didn't know I needed the same things for me." P4 informed that developing relationships and meaning in the work he does with the children helps develop a sense of well-being for both him and the child and attachment was important:

Little by little, we were getting closer you know. Like we aligned when we became attuned to each other's needs. I remember he told me I was the first adult in his life who really cared to listen; everyone else just nagged and nagged. I listened. We bonded. It was special.

P5 described a time when she felt a sense of purpose and fulfillment in her role as caregiver to her foster child: "A lot of it was just experiencing a lot of feelings of empathy and compassion for the child and this helped with more positive interactions and a greater sense of connection." Similarly, P9 said the fear slowly dissipated when she "remember[ed] reading somewhere that focusing on building trust and creating a nurturing, supportive environment can save pretty much any relationship." P9 discussed how she did this:

I spent a lot of quality time with him, engaging in activities he enjoyed, and providing consistent care. I was very attentive to understanding and responding to his unique needs and preferences, which helped with a sense of safety and security for him. An activity we did that he enjoyed was reading before bedtime. He said he had never been read to. I couldn't believe it!

Subtheme: Healthy Relationship With the Child

Building positive emotions with the foster child is crucial for the development of well-being in foster parents. Positive emotions play a key role in this process, as they can help to foster feelings of safety, trust, and connection between the foster parent and child. Forming a positive and nurturing relationship with the child is crucial in establishing a healthy relationship. P8 said she engaged in activities that the children enjoyed. She said she was present and attentive during conversations and interactions and showed interest in their life: "I guess it's a no-brainer, we got along better when I created the space to play and interact." Positive emotions helped P9 to facilitate positive interactions between the foster parent and the rest of the family. For example, she encouraged the rest of the family to express enthusiasm and interest in the child's activities and achievements to strengthen their relationship. P9 said, "He felt right at home when we were enthusiastic about him joining the family." This experience helped to build a sense of connection and mutual respect.

Positive relationships can also play a role in helping foster parents and foster children co-regulate their emotions. When a foster parent models positive emotional behavior, it can help the child learn to regulate their own emotions in a healthy way. P1

made a direct correlation between her ability to regulate her emotions and that of the child to aid in forming a healthy relationship:

What a sense of accomplishment when I model positive emotional behavior and the child can do the same. I know it helped her because she learned to regulate her own emotions in a healthy way. I felt so much better when we were in-synch.

Other participants also described instances where they nurtured healing and growth to experience their own well-being. P3 described adopting this process through positive and nonjudgmental interactions with the child: “healing can only happen if we aren’t judgmental.” An important part of the experience described by P3 when asked how she managed stress to improve well-being was avoid placing unrealistic expectations on the child or herself: “A healthy relationship with my foster child changed when I praised more than corrected, particularly when trying to show up for him in a non-judgmental way.”

Theme 2: Support Networks

Support networks are crucial for enhancing the well-being of foster parents (Sharda et al., 2019). Fostering can be a challenging and stressful experience, and foster parents may need emotional and practical support to manage the demands of caring for a child with a history of sexual trauma. In this section, participants shared how support networks impacted or influenced their experienced well-being when fostering children with a history of sexual abuse.

Subtheme: Professional Support, Guidance, and Help With Practical Tasks

P3 said she had to resort to seeking professional support to increase well-being: “After a while I was just failing at everything. My sister, who’s a mental health therapist, convinced me to see a therapist.” P1 often shares a background in common with the children she has fostered:

I got into fostering because I was there once and what has gotten me to a better place is reaching out to community support. There’s a support network organized by the Guardian ad Litem for foster parents I found out early into my fostering journey and it has been a world of a difference. I tell you; I feel so much better like I am doing the right thing because others are there to help me in this journey.

Foster parents may work with case managers to coordinate services and support for the child in their care. P8 described how case managers provided guidance on navigating the child welfare system and accessing resources and services. Additionally, case management provided P8 with education support: “They helped with homework, advocacy for the child's educational needs, and coordination with teachers and school administrators.” P6 said he had trouble navigating all the resources, but found clarity and relief when a case manager assigned to his case provided home health care:

I didn’t think they would place a child with medical needs with me since I was widowed and I am in my 60s, but I didn’t say no. She had a feeding tube and a lot of medical trauma and sexual abuse. I almost gave up! But the case manager was so helpful that she coordinated home health care and I had a nurse come every other day to help.

P7 has also learned that guidance can aid in increasing well-being and stated, “Being single and doing the work of fostering is very hard, but the local fostering agency has guided me every step of the way, so I don’t feel alone.” P7 has also recognized the importance of reaching out: “I can reach out to foster respite which helps to care for my foster kids when I’m out of town. They are so helpful and that makes me happy.”

For Participant P5, practical support came in the form of help with transporting the child to appointments or managing their daily needs. When asked about describing a particularly difficult case and how she worked through it, she described, “There’s a local organization that helps with transportation. Since my divorce, I lost the husband and his family, which was my family support then I couldn’t find anyone to help drive the kids to school and doctor appoints.” Another form of practical support was described by P2 who noted,

My neighbor, she’s a social worker so she knows about this, helped with managing daily tasks for the one foster child I had when I first started fostering. Sometimes she walked him to the bus stop and other times she helped with groceries. These little moments made me so happy. We formed a long friendship, and I can say this is one way that positively impacted my well-being.

Subtheme: Peer Support, Support Groups, and Community

Peer support, groups, and community can be powerful tools to enhance the well-being of foster parents. P6 expressed, “Fostering can be an isolating experience” and “I have a hard time connecting with other foster parents cause the majority are women and I’m a man who lives alone; that’s kinda odd I suppose.” To reduce feelings of loneliness

and provide a sense of belonging, P5 who is divorced, believes that engagement and relationship helped her with her experience of well-being when, “the opportunity to meet others came knocking at my door, literally, when my neighbors across the street were fostering too!” Peer support can provide practical advice, emotional support, and a safe space to share experiences. P5 elaborated,

We realized that within a 2-mile radius, there were five families who were fostering. A sense of relief came over me, you know. No one knows about this [referring to experience of fostering] but those who are doing it. Those at the beginning of the process got advice from the veterans. It’s like we had formed our own little space; a community of fosters.

P4 prioritized on building a sense of community to help her feel supported and valued: “I mostly connected with other foster parents, we also connected with others in the community; our church was very helpful.” P3 presented a scenario to illustrate how support groups helped her develop relationships and experience well-being:

Day by day, I formed good relationships with others, which after my divorce, I didn’t think was possible. The foster support group gave us all a sense of connectedness. We talked about our struggles and the good times too. We meet on Saturdays and the kids play. We try to keep an agenda of what we do for each other. I feel fulfilled.

P8 participated in an annual “Be a Hero” fundraiser organized by local community agencies and organizations to support the needs of foster children and foster families. P8 described feeling like she belonged and, “I felt more supported and less

isolated because I then met other foster moms who were also divorced and found meaning in the work we do.” P8 expanded on her experience finding support in the community:

The “Be a Hero” event happens annually and the goal is to provide foster parents like me with opportunities to engage in activities and experiences that we may not otherwise have access to. For example, they also do a cultural festival to expose families in attendance with new foods, traditions, and perspectives, which serve to enrich our lives and broaden their horizons. The foster child I am fostering now is from Mexico and I being that I am Black, I had no clue how to expose her to her culture. This event was so helpful in learning about Mexican culture and to meet others in the community and make friends.

Theme 3: Parenting and Coping Strategies

Participants shared their understanding of parenting and coping strategies as powerful tools to enhance their well-being. Fostering can be a challenging and stressful experience, but with the right support and strategies, it is possible to “develop resilience and coping skills to manage the demands of fostering” expressed P2. Some participants shared their experiences with parenting strategies such as building routines, establishing boundaries, and creating a safe and supportive environment. Other participants emphasized that coping strategies involved managing the emotional impact of fostering children who have experienced sexual abuse.

Subtheme: Strategies to Build Routines, Establish Boundaries, and Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment

P2 highlighted the need to build routines when she gets a new placement. When asked about what she found most challenging about supporting children with a history of sexual abuse she mentioned,

Oftentimes, they [foster children] come with no rules and that means no routines. There is resistance when trying to implement a routine. The first month is all about building that routine 'cause kids demand rules, you know. What I do is I set consistent schedules, like for meals, bedtime, and other activities. I have my own bio kids and they are all on the same routine. This is good for structure and it is also the predictability factor that no one feels like they have to guess what's next.

When asked about the various ways the participant manages stress to improve their well-being, P9 said she benefited from creating a daily routine that includes regular activities such as exercise, meal preparation, and playtime with the child. This provided the foster child with a sense of purpose and stability in their day-to-day life: "We had a chore chart that spins, and it was fun because whatever it landed on, that's what we did, including the adults in the house."

P4 described his experience with boundaries and the twenty-eight years he served in the correctional system. He correlated that experience with fostering a child with a history of sexual abuse:

Setting boundaries always ensures safety. It worked for the inmates and it sure helps with the children who have experienced trauma or neglect because they

have difficulty understanding what is safe and what is not, and sometimes engage in risky behavior or put themselves in dangerous situations. Setting clear boundaries and rules helps protect the child from harm. I actually have some rules written out in a visible area and we go over them all the time. They end up appreciating the boundaries in the end.

P1 was candid about her experiences growing up in the foster care system, which motivated her to become a foster parent: “I remember that boundaries were a big deal.” She describes different scenarios such as boundaries with curfew when she reached adolescence in the foster care system. P1 also shared addressing a similar boundary with her now adolescent foster child:

She likes to test the waters, you know. She’s getting to an age where she wants to go out with her friends all the time, but there’s a curfew! Yeah, she knows she’s gotta be home by no later than 11 at night. And what happens if she doesn’t make it? Oh, she doesn’t have her phone for at least a week.

P7 was forthcoming about her belief system and being open minded about the experience of fostering. P7 explained that to create a safe and supporting environment, foster parents should be open minded and provide emotional safety by creating a supportive and accepting atmosphere where the child feels heard and understood. She attributes her belief system to the fact that she does not subscribe to any religious affiliation, but rather, she is spiritual. When asked how she develops relationships and meaning in the work she does with the foster child(ren) and how it influences her well-being, she elaborated,

I provide emotional support by being available and attentive to the child's needs. This means I also provide positive reinforcement, and I offer comfort and reassurance. When I think of well-being for me is in the kind of support I give that always comes back around. It is a reciprocal experience. They feel safe with me and that is so meaningful to me; my spirit is full!

Subtheme: Coping to Manage Emotional Impact of Fostering

When asked about how participants characterize or describe their experiences of well-being, many talked about engaging in self-care activities, educating themselves, and using positive coping mechanisms. For example, P3 says that when she feels “drained,” or sad, she prioritizes her own self-care to manage the emotional impact of fostering. This includes getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and engaging in activities that promote relaxation and stress reduction.

Self-care looked a bit different for P4 who is now retired and enjoys spending time with family and friends. P4 detailed his experience with self-care to develop well-being:

I have many hobbies; yes, they are possible at my age. I like hobbies and activities that bring me joy, like fishing, golfing, and bowling. Everything that I do I also try to do with my family and friends because it helps with my overall well-being. My daughter is a manager at a local golf club and I'm always there. The foster kid we have now is an avid golfer, all after we took him in. I love when he gets excited to go golfing.

Although almost every participant mentioned not having enough time to incorporate daily self-care practices, they all mentioned getting enough sleep as a top priority. P7, who is single, chuckled when she said not sharing a bed with anyone helps her get enough sleep. P7 identified sleep as a factor that impacts her well-being after having fostered a child with a history of sexual abuse: “When I don’t get enough sleep, I am miserable and everyone else is too. Sleep is a top priority, especially cause I work twelve hour shifts.”

Foster parents can educate themselves about the impact of trauma on children and learn strategies for managing behavior and promoting healing. This sentiment was expressed by nearly all the participants. P2, P5, P6, P7, and P8 elaborated on educating themselves about the dynamics of fostering before getting licensed and taking the first step to fostering. P2 and P5 attended a conference that focused on the child welfare system. Both participants work in the education field and found themselves attending the same conference. “My time at the conference was filled with tools that helped me make up my mind about fostering,” affirmed P2. “I kinda knew what fostering was, but the conference solidified those ideas; I was prepared to take the first step,” said P5.

Many government websites provide information on foster care, including state-specific laws and regulations, statistics, and resources for foster parents and children. P6 and P7 went online to educate themselves about the foster care system. “You know how they say, education is power?” asked P6, “Well, that’s just what I had to do. I feel empowered when I have all the answers.” There are several online communities and forums for foster parents, including Facebook groups and online forums, that the

participants found to be helpful in their quest for knowledge. For example, P7 joined several online foster education groups, and P8 said,

I went online to get all the questions answered. I also found it was a great way to connect with other foster parents, ask questions, and share experiences. Not everything is answered when you get licensed. You don't get most of it at those licensing meetings, but you do in those online forums.

Participants say they use positive coping strategies to manage stress and difficult emotions, such as mindfulness, meditation, deep breathing exercises, and journaling. P5 explained she engages in activities, such as deep breathing and meditation. Deep breathing, she said "helps to activate the body's relaxation response to reduce stress." P5 also talked about teaching this technique to the foster children in her care. Additionally, P5 talked about meditation in greater detail:

Meditation has had a number of positive effects on my overall well-being. I have noticed a reduction in stress and anxiety and am better able to manage challenging situations without becoming overwhelmed. I am also more aware of my thoughts and emotions and am better able to regulate them in a healthy way. I typically practice meditation for 10-20 minutes each day, either in the morning or before bed. I start by finding a quiet, comfortable place to sit, either on a cushion or a chair, and close my eyes. I focus my attention on my breath, observing the sensation of the air moving in and out of my body.

Theme 4: Training and Preparation

Specialized training such as trauma-informed care and managing challenging behaviors is one of the emerging themes that was discovered in the experience of well-being for foster parents. Participants assert that after receiving training in trauma-informed care, they are better equipped to understand the needs of children who have experienced trauma and provide them with the support and care they need to heal. Participants also explained how receiving proper support that includes clear communication, realistic expectations, and access to resources were crucial to developing well-being. In this section, participants shared how they experienced well-being in relation to receiving proper training and preparation before and during fostering.

Subtheme: Specialized Training in Trauma-Informed Care

P1 explained that becoming a foster parent is a significant responsibility, and specialized training and preparation are crucial to ensure that foster parents are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children in their care. P1 responded as follows:

Pre-service training is apparently something new. I called my foster parent when I was in the system and she didn't get this training then. This training was provided to me before I became a licensed foster parents. This training covered many topics like the foster care system, child development, trauma-informed care, attachment and bonding, understanding the needs of children, and managing challenging behaviors. I can say this training was very important to my well-being.

Accessing and coordinating services for trauma informed care developed as a key subtheme in the experience of well-being. Many children in foster care have experienced trauma, abuse, neglect, or other adverse experiences. Training in trauma-informed care helps foster parents understand the impact of trauma on children's behaviors, emotions, and development. It equips them with strategies to create a safe and supportive environment that promotes healing and resilience. P8 described her experience with accessing trauma-informed training:

Training to understand trauma has given me a deeper understanding of the impact of trauma in the life of the kids I've fostered. It has helped me recognize how trauma can affect their behaviors, emotions, and overall development. This has been invaluable in providing the appropriate support and creating a safe environment for the children in my care and yes, it helps with my well-being.

When asked about what support P6 feels he needs from the child-welfare agencies to improve his well-being he said,

One important aspect of doing the fostering work is that we need to know about trauma-informed care. This kind of training is the emphasis on self-care for us parents. The one I did to get licensed reminded me of the importance of taking care of my own well-being to avoid burnout and be emotionally available for the children. I've learned to recognize signs of stress and prioritize self-care practices to maintain my own resilience.

Subtheme: Support, Clear Communication, Realistic Expectations, and Access to Resources

Foster parents often expressed various sentiments about support, clear communication, realistic expectations, and access to resources provided by foster agencies. “The support I received from our foster agency has been good, but I wish there was more clear communication” said P2. She expanded by saying that the foster agency has been there for her family every step of the way, offering guidance, answering questions, and addressing concerns the family has had. According to P4, knowing that he had a support system to turn to when the family needed help has made a significant difference in his fostering journey:

Open and clear communication with our foster agency has been essential. They keep us informed about any updates or changes in the foster care system, regulations, or policies. They are prompt in responding to our inquiries and provide us with the necessary information to make informed decisions about the children in our care. The agency has also given us access to resources that have been incredibly helpful because now we’re not that young and don’t go out much into the community to see what’s out there. We were told about different training opportunities and workshops and also to support groups and respite care. That level of communication offers tremendous support.

Participants expand on their experiences with support from the foster agency and many described their interactions with various agencies. “The local foster agency has been a strong advocate for me and the children that come to me,” expressed P7. P7

explained that she worked closely with other professionals involved in the foster care system, such as caseworkers, therapists, and educators, to ensure that the children's needs are met. This collaborative approach has created a support network that promotes the well-being of the children and fosters their success, explained P1, P2, and P7. P2 expanded on this experience:

Our foster agency has offered us continuous training and education opportunities. They understand the importance of staying informed and up to date on best practices in child welfare and foster care and I can say they do reach out to us. Through these training programs, we have been able to enhance our skills, learn new strategies, and better meet the needs of the children we care for.

Theme 5: Impact on Family and Personal Life

Another overarching theme that emerged from the data was the impact on family and personal life because of foster parenting. Foster parenting often brings changes to the dynamics of the foster family. Introducing new children into the household, with their unique needs and challenges, can create adjustments and disruptions to established routines, relationships, and roles within the family.

Subtheme: Disruption to the Family Routine and Financial Implications

Fostering often requires sacrifices and adjustments to the lives of foster families. For P5, disruption to the family routine meant being available for meetings, appointments, and court hearings, and sometimes rearranging work or social schedules. “We may need to make adjustments to our living arrangements or take on additional

responsibilities,” P5 explained. Fostering requires flexibility and adaptability in daily life.

P4 explained on the concept of disruption and family routine:

We have learned to adjust our routines and plans to ensure that the kids receive the attention and support they need. We have a big board with a calendar in my home office and that’s our go to for appointments. Yes, we have had so many disruptions this past year; things like investment of time, energy, and resources. As a family, we have had to juggle multiple responsibilities, like attending court hearings, medical appointments, and meetings with caseworkers and therapists. This did a number on our personal time, work-life balance, and relationships within the family.

Foster parenting may bring financial implications for the family. Most of the foster parents went into detail about the additional costs associated with caring for a foster child, such as food, clothing, and other necessities, can impact the family's budget and financial stability. P3 and P5 both expressed distresses related to financial implications when fostering. P3 explained,

Fostering has brought about additional financial responsibilities for me. I got divorced a few years ago and it’s hard financially. I understand the importance of providing for the basic needs of the foster child, such as food, clothing, and personal care items, but I didn’t realize I was pulling out of my savings to stay afloat. I had to budget and allocate resources accordingly to ensure that we all had what we need.

P5 shared the sentiment of financial implications of foster parting with P3. P5 added,

Fostering has taught me the importance of careful planning and budgeting. In this year, I have learned to be more mindful of spending and finding ways to save money and seek out community resources or donations because money is tight.

Subtheme: Difficulty Meeting Personal Needs

Foster parents shared different experiences and perspectives regarding the challenges of meeting their personal needs while fostering. A common sentiment expressed by participants P2 and P7 was time constraints, “I didn’t realize how demanding and time-consuming this could be [referring to fostering],” P2 explained. P7 said, “It literally left me little time for personal needs and self-care. The responsibilities of caring for these kids have left me with limited time for myself.” P4 said that fostering requires careful time management and prioritization to ensure he can meet his own needs:

Finding a balance between personal needs and fostering has been really challenging. The balancing act has been attentive to the needs of the children while also carving out time for our own well-being. I think alongside my wife, we made conscious choices and we had to set boundaries to make sure that our personal needs were not being neglected.

P7 expanded on how fostering can be emotionally draining, “leaving me with less energy for personal things.” Dealing with the complexities and challenges of foster care can take a toll on emotional well-being as expressed by P5:

I knew it was important to find ways to replenish my emotional reserves and find support from others to prevent burnout. I realized I was slowly losing touch with social life and opportunities for personal connections. I used to meet for coffee with the local ladies, but the demands of fostering made it difficult to maintain regular social activities or spend time with friends and extended family. My mom reached out once and told me that we need to be intentional in seeking social support and finding ways to maintain our relationships despite the challenges.

Subtheme: Family and Cultural Concerns Intensify Commitment

Family and cultural concerns can indeed intensify the commitment of individuals to continue to foster, as explained by various participants. “My Latino roots relating to family relations prioritize compassion, empathy, and helping those in need” expressed P2. The desire to provide a safe and loving home for children who may have experienced adversity aligns P2’s family values and strengthens her commitment to fostering:

Our family values involve love, support, and compassion. Fostering fits perfectly with these values and that is why it allowed me and my husband to extend our love and support to these kids in need who may not have experienced it before.

It's a way to open our hearts and provide a safe place for those in need.

P2 also expanded on this commitment by saying,

Respect and honor are big traditions in our culture and this was a clash when we had the first foster child come into our home. We always celebrate important cultural events, holidays, and customs to provide a sense of belonging, but there was tension from the child we got in the beginning because he was Haitian and

we didn't know what to do to help celebrate his cultural heritage. This placement didn't last long, but I don't know if this was the reason or other reasons.

P6 shared his concern with family commitment as he explored fostering after he became a widow:

Managing the responsibilities of fostering alone can be overwhelming. I tried reaching out to some family and some said that they had some reservations with bringing in someone else's child into their home. They just didn't know why I was fostering and I gotta say, I get it, a white guy fostering a little black child is kinda weird in my community.

Summary

This study focused on one central question: What is the experience of well-being among foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse? Five major themes and 12 subthemes were drawn from the participant responses. Overall, for the nine foster parents in this study, the experience of well-being while fostering children with a history of sexual abuse was explored. Fostering children with a history of sexual abuse is something that the participants described affected them personally and discussed aspects of how this affected their own well-being.

The findings revealed that foster parents experience a wide range of emotions in their role, including both positive and negative aspects. Foster parents experienced a range of emotions, including joy, fulfillment, but also stress and frustration. They expressed the need for emotional support and guidance to navigate the challenges of foster parenting. The study on foster parent well-being explored the theme of the impact

on family and personal life. The findings revealed that fostering has a significant impact on the family and personal lives of foster parents.

In Chapter 5, I revisit the rationale for conducting the study, delve into a deeper interpretation and synthesis of the findings, address any limitations that emerged during the research process, and provide recommendations for further exploration in this field. Additionally, I explore the implications of these results for positive social change and share my final thoughts and concluding statements. This final section serves as a comprehensive summary and reflection on the study's objectives, outcomes, and potential avenues for future research and practical applications to promote positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the well-being among foster parents of children with a history of sexual abuse. I conducted this study to understand how foster parents experience well-being after having fostered children with a history of sexual abuse. In addition, I wanted to provide a deep understanding of the experiences of well-being of these foster parents. Sexual abuse can have a severe and lasting impact on children, and foster parents caring for these children may face unique challenges that require specialized support.

I completed this study seeking the answer to one research question: What is the experience of well-being among foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse? I used purposive sampling to recruit nine foster parents who had fostered children with a history of sexual abuse. I conducted nine in-depth semistructured telephone interviews using my IRB-approved interview protocol of 11 questions related to their experiences with well-being. I collected nearly 11 hours of rich voice-recorded response data from the participants.

There were eight findings organized within five major themes and 12 subthemes that emerged from the data analysis through coding, categorizing, grouping, and regrouping the data into themes that reflected the views of the participants in response to the research question. The findings align within each of the five major themes as follows.

Theme #1 Emotional Impact

- Finding #1: Foster parents caring for children who have experienced sexual abuse may experience a significant emotional toll and a challenging time establishing trust and forming healthy attachments, which could lead to feelings of frustration or failure in foster parents.

Theme #2 Support Networks

- Finding #2: Foster parents highlight the significant role that professional support services provide as essential help in managing the challenges and stressors involved in fostering and the critical role of peer support in their well-being.

Theme #3 Parenting and Coping Strategies

- Finding #3: Foster parents identified specific strategies, such as creating a safe and secure environment, incorporating specific routines or practices that the child finds comforting, and employing a variety of coping mechanisms to manage stress and maintain their own well-being.

Theme #4 Training and Preparation

- Finding #4: Foster parents desire more specific training on certain topics that might be especially relevant for dealing with the particular needs of children who have experienced sexual abuse.
- Finding # 5: Foster parents highlighted the value of ongoing training and support, rather than only providing preparation at the beginning of the fostering process implying that inadequate training and preparation could have a significant impact on their well-being.

Theme #5 Impact on Family and Personal Life

- Finding #6: Foster parents expressed that fostering a child with a history of sexual abuse significantly influenced family dynamics and personal relationships.
- Finding #7: Foster parents highlighted the substantial time, financial, and emotional commitment required in foster care, which could limit foster parents' availability for other activities and responsibilities.
- Finding # 8: Foster parents noted that family and cultural concerns intensify commitment and despite the challenges, many foster parents experienced personal growth, increased resilience, and a sense of fulfillment from their role.

One of the major findings indicated that the experience of well-being appears to be a multifaceted concept that encompasses not just the absence of negative factors like stress or emotional distress but also the presence of positive elements such as personal growth, resilience, supportive relationships, and a sense of fulfillment or purpose. The various aspects of a foster parent's life -- personal, professional, familial -- are interconnected and can all influence their overall well-being. In this chapter, I summarize the reasoning for conducting my study, deliver further interpretation and syntheses of the findings, offer discussion on the limitations that arose, share suggestions for future research, cover the implications of these results for positive social change, and share concluding statements.

Interpretation of the Findings

Well-being is a highly individual experience, influenced by emotional impact, support networks, parenting and coping mechanisms, resources, and the specific

challenges encountered (Leake et al., 2019). Therefore, well-being is not static but dynamic and evolving, influenced by changing circumstances, challenges, and support systems (Leontopoulou, 2020). For instance, the well-being of foster parents may fluctuate as they navigate different stages of the fostering journey and as the needs of the child evolve.

Foster parenting can influence all five elements of the PERMA model, as it can shape a person's emotional reactions, engagement with the world, relationships, sense of meaning, support systems, and achievement (Seligman, 2018). In this study, I found that well-being is a highly individual experience, influenced by emotional impact. Emotional impact aligns with positive emotion in the PERMA theory of well-being. The emotional impact of different events and experiences contributes significantly to the foster parents' experience of well-being.

The nine foster parents in this study experienced well-being within the reality of the conditions they faced daily when fostering children with a history of sexual abuse. The study revealed that the well-being of foster parents is not incidental, meaning it is not a random or unintended outcome. Instead, it is experienced as a crucial part of their fostering work. Their well-being is inextricably linked to their role as foster parents, shaped by a wide array of factors, including the challenges and rewards of the fostering journey, the support systems in place, the training and preparation they receive, their personal coping strategies, and the impact on their family and personal life. The coping mechanisms mentioned by the foster parents are linked to engagement. The way they

engaged with their fostering experiences and the strategies used to handle stress or adversity shaped their experiences with well-being.

Emotional Impact

Finding #1: Foster parents caring for children who have experienced sexual abuse may experience a significant emotional toll and a challenging time establishing trust and forming healthy attachments, which could lead to feelings of frustration or failure in foster parents.

This finding matches extant literature that has suggested that foster parenting is a significant responsibility, often accompanied by its own emotional challenges and rewards (Randle et al., 2016). When caring for children who have experienced sexual abuse, the emotional complexities become significantly amplified. Foster parents grappled with a range of intense emotions (Blythe et al., 2013). Foster parents may feel deep empathy and sadness for the child's past experiences and also feel triggered by events they have experienced themselves, as P1 explained. Dealing with the aftermath of abuse can be a heartbreaking process, and this emotional burden can lead to significant stress and emotional exhaustion, sometimes known as compassion fatigue or secondary traumatic stress (McKeough et al., 2017).

Children who have experienced sexual abuse often find it hard to trust adults, which is a normal protective response after experiencing trauma (Letourneau et al., 2019). As a result, it can take considerable time for foster parents to gain their trust. During this process, foster parents may feel frustrated, helpless, or ineffectual, especially when their efforts to connect with the child or provide care and comfort are met with

resistance or mistrust. This was confirmed by P2 who said she struggled with trust issues and forming an attachment with the child. Forming a secure attachment with a child who has experienced sexual abuse is another significant challenge identified here and supported by the literature. Schoemaker et al. (2020) discovered that this significant domain in particular, attachment, determines the level of permanency in foster placements and that foster parents are vital to understanding this dynamic. The child may struggle with issues such as fear of intimacy, unpredictable emotional responses, or difficulty in expressing their needs in a healthy way. These challenges can make it difficult for foster parents to develop a secure, healthy bond with the child, potentially leading to feelings of failure or inadequacy.

Support Networks

Finding #2: Foster parents highlight the significant role that professional support services provide as essential help in managing the challenges and stressors involved in fostering and the critical role of peer support in their well-being.

This finding supports the PERMA theory of well-being because support networks directly correspond to relationships. Healthy, supportive relationships contribute to a sense of well-being, as they can provide emotional support, increase feelings of self-worth, and contribute to a sense of belonging (Seligman, 2011).

Finding #2 also matches current knowledge, that when caring for children with a history of sexual abuse, foster parents face unique challenges that require specialized knowledge, skills, and support. Two key forms of support often highlighted are professional support and peer support (Brown et al., 2019). Professional support can be

instrumental in helping foster parents navigate the complexities of their role (Brown et al., 2019). Therapists or counselors with expertise in trauma can provide foster parents with strategies to support the child's emotional healing, as well as help foster parents manage their own stress or secondary trauma, such as P3. P3 said she had to resort to seeking professional support to increase well-being. Professionals can provide training on trauma-informed care, attachment strategies, behavior management techniques, and other essential skills for foster parents. This training can increase foster parents' confidence and competence in their role.

While professional support is vital, the role of peer support is often just as critical in fostering the well-being of foster parents. P6 stated that fostering can be an isolating experience. Other foster parents can provide emotional support, offering empathy and understanding that comes from shared experiences. This support can help reduce feelings of isolation and validate the challenges and emotions that foster parents experienced while fostering (Sartore et al., 2021). P5 elaborated that peers can provide practical advice based on their own experiences, offering tips and insights that professionals, who may not have personal experience with foster parenting, might not be able to provide. Peer support networks or groups can provide a sense of community, making foster parents feel part of a collective journey rather than facing the challenges alone. This sense of belonging, as described by Seligman (2011), can be a significant factor in resilience and well-being. Seeing how other foster parents handle challenges can provide realistic models for behavior and mindset. More experienced foster parents can also serve as mentors for those new to the journey.

Parenting and Coping Strategies

Finding #3: Foster parents identified specific strategies, such as creating a safe and secure environment, incorporating specific routines or practices that the child finds comforting, and employing a variety of coping mechanisms to manage stress and maintain their own well-being.

Foster parents explained that they often needed to employ specific strategies to support both the children in their care and their own well-being. A safe and secure environment is paramount for a child who has experienced sexual abuse (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). The foster parents in this study took measures to ensure physical safety, as well as emotional safety by fostering open communication, like referenced by P4. This also included creating spaces in the home where the child feels particularly safe, such as a dedicated quiet space for calming down when feeling overwhelmed.

P2 emphasized that structure and predictability can be soothing for children with a history of trauma. Foster parents might establish regular routines around daily activities like meals, schoolwork, and bedtime (North American Council on Adoptable Children, 2017). They might also incorporate specific practices that the child finds comforting, such as reading a certain book, playing particular games, or using relaxation techniques. P2 explained that these routines and practices can provide a sense of stability and predictability, which can help the child feel more secure and less anxious.

Foster parents also need to take care of their own mental and emotional well-being (Leontopoulou, 2020). For some foster parents, such as P5, this involved using

stress management techniques such as mindfulness, exercise, journaling, or engaging in hobbies. P2 and P4 explained how using coping strategies such as cognitive reframing or seeking support from friends, family, or professionals when they were feeling overwhelmed changed the way they thought about a stressful situation. Additionally, maintaining a self-care routine and setting personal boundaries are critical to preventing burnout and ensuring they have the emotional capacity to support the child (Cooley et al., 2017).

Training and Preparation

Finding #4: Foster parents desired more specific training on certain topics that might be especially relevant for dealing with the needs of children who have experienced sexual abuse.

This finding was not surprising, as the responsibility of fostering a child who has experienced sexual abuse can be complex and challenging, necessitating specific training to equip foster parents with the knowledge and skills needed to provide optimal care (see Griffiths et al., 2021). Training to help foster parents understand the nature and impact of trauma, especially sexual abuse, is crucial. For P8, this included understanding common symptoms and behaviors, how trauma can affect a child's development and mental health, and the concept of trauma triggers.

P1 and P8 said they benefitted from training in trauma-informed care principles, focusing on recognizing and responding to the effects of trauma. This training should guide them on how to create a safe and supportive environment that promotes healing (Miller et al., 2018). P2 expanded that training should focus on strategies to develop trust

and form secure attachments with children who may have attachment issues due to their past experiences. It is essential for foster parents to learn effective and sensitive behavior management techniques. Children who have experienced sexual abuse may exhibit challenging behaviors because of their trauma, and traditional discipline strategies may not be effective or appropriate (Salerno et al., 2020).

Finding # 5: Foster parents highlighted the value of ongoing training and support, rather than only providing preparation at the beginning of the fostering process implying that inadequate training and preparation could have a significant impact on their well-being.

This finding supports the understanding that foster parenting is a dynamic and ongoing process, and the needs of both the foster parents and the children in their care can change over time (Leontopoulou, 2020). As such, training and support should be ongoing, rather than limited to the beginning of the fostering process. P1 noted that she did not have access to ongoing training. The needs of a child who has experienced sexual abuse can evolve as they grow and develop and as they progress in their healing journey. Foster parents said they would benefit from ongoing training that helps them adapt to these changing needs.

In addition to training, foster parents said they needed continued professional support. Foster parents said regular check-ins with social workers, access to therapists or counselors who understand the unique challenges of foster parenting, and resources for handling emergencies or crisis situations, are support they would need on an ongoing basis. P4 mentioned that regular resource updates in the form of newsletters, webinars, or

workshops could be very useful (Participant P4). Inadequate training and support could leave foster parents feeling ill-prepared and overwhelmed, which could negatively impact their well-being and their ability to provide the best care for the children in their charge (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). On the other hand, as mentioned by P1, foster parents mentioned that ongoing training and support can help them feel more confident and competent, which can contribute to better outcomes for both the foster parents and the children they care for (P1).

Impact on Family and Personal Life

Finding #6: Foster parents expressed that fostering a child with a history of sexual abuse significantly influenced family dynamics and personal relationships.

This insight from participants was noteworthy and important to highlight. When a foster child, particularly one with a history of sexual abuse, enters a family, it inevitably impacts the existing family dynamics and personal relationships (Frederico et al., 2017). The addition of a new family member who requires considerable emotional support can shift the balance of attention and resources within the family. P3 said that biological or previously fostered children in the family may feel neglected or overlooked. P2 and P7 explained that it is vital to communicate openly with all members of the family about these changes and provide reassurance of their continued love and care.

P9 said that friends and extended family members may not fully understand or appreciate the challenges associated with fostering a child with a history of sexual abuse. Foster parents said they felt judged, misunderstood, or unsupported, leading to changes in these relationships. Alternatively, P5 mentioned that the shared experience of fostering

can also lead to new friendships, particularly with other foster parents or individuals involved in child welfare.

The time and emotional commitment required in caring for a child who has experienced sexual abuse can also affect the foster parents' personal life (Miller et al., 2019). P3 found she had less time for personal hobbies, self-care, and career ambitions. P8 found this sacrifice rewarding, while P4 struggled with the loss of personal time or identity. On the positive side, fostering a child with a history of sexual abuse can also lead to significant personal growth and new perspectives (Thoman et al., 2019). P2 said that it can foster qualities of patience, resilience, and empathy, and lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of the complexities of human behavior and relationships.

Finding #7: Foster parents highlighted the substantial time, financial, and emotional commitment required in foster care, which could limit foster parents' availability for other activities and responsibilities.

This finding seemed to summarize all or most of the previous ones, highlighting that fostering a child, particularly one who has experienced sexual abuse, requires significant commitment, and can have substantial implications on the foster parents' life. P5 expressed that foster parents are responsible for the day-to-day care of the child, including meals, schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and medical appointments. Additionally, children who have experienced trauma may require more time for therapy, court dates, or other specialized services. This can result in less time for personal activities, hobbies, or other commitments. In some cases, it might even limit the foster parent's availability for full-time work or advancement in their careers, said P7.

P3 and P5 confirmed that while foster parents receive a stipend to assist with the cost of caring for the child, these funds may not cover all expenses. Costs such as therapy, extracurricular activities, additional educational support, or modifications to the home to ensure a safe and comfortable environment can add up. This could lead to financial strain or limit the family's ability to participate in other activities or experiences they previously enjoyed (Davi et al., 2021).

With the increased demands of fostering, other activities and responsibilities may need to be deprioritized. P4 said that this reprioritization could impact the foster parents' social life, hobbies, work commitments, or other family activities. It might also limit their ability to take spontaneous trips or engage in certain activities that are not suitable or comfortable for the child.

Finding # 8: Foster parents noted that family and cultural concerns intensify commitment and despite the challenges, many foster parents experienced personal growth, increased resilience, and a sense of fulfillment from their role.

Although most previous findings focused on challenges, it is important to note how these participants were able to describe significant benefits from the experience. Fostering a child, particularly one who has experienced sexual abuse, can be incredibly challenging, yet it can also lead to profound personal growth and fulfillment (Gouveia et al., 2021). Family and cultural values often play a significant role in shaping this experience. In some cultures, strong traditions of communal child-rearing or taking care of others in need can strengthen the commitment to foster, P8 explained. P2 expanded on being raised in a home with a strong sense of social responsibility and empathy which

helped her feel particularly committed to providing a safe and loving home for a child who has experienced trauma. This sense of commitment, driven by deeply held values, can help foster parents navigate the challenges and remain dedicated to their role (Delgado et al., 2015).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the challenges associated with fostering, many foster parents, like P3, reported experiencing significant personal growth. This included developing a greater understanding of trauma and its effects, learning new parenting or coping strategies, and gaining a deeper appreciation for the strength and resilience of children. P5 and P9 also reported developing a greater sense of empathy, patience, and adaptability. Many foster parents derive a deep sense of fulfillment from their role. This can come from seeing the child heal and grow, from providing a stable and loving home for a child in need, or simply from living in alignment with their values of care and compassion. Despite the difficulties, P5 expressed that this sense of fulfillment can provide a powerful motivation to continue fostering.

Limitations of the Study

Participation in this research was voluntary. The results I derived from analysis and the level of accuracy were limited to the participant's candid responses and my implementation of ethical analysis practices (Mampane & Omidire, 2018). My direct interactions with the participants during the recruitment and interviews allowed personal biases to influence the analyses of the participants' responses which I managed by implementing the strategies for ensuring trustworthiness outlined in chapter 4 (Heng, 2019).

The limited sample of nine participants interviewed resulted in multiple flaws in my study design. First, the participants self-selected to participate and no formal assessment of experiencing well-being was administered. This allowed the possible inclusion of participants who may not have experienced well-being or that may have experienced well-being at different levels of intensity.

Recommendations

Based on the themes and findings discussed, there are several recommendations that could potentially enhance the experience and well-being of foster parents caring for children with a history of sexual abuse. Foster parent training should be comprehensive, covering areas such as understanding trauma, trauma-informed care, attachment building strategies, effective behavior management techniques, and self-care and coping strategies (Chateauneuf et al., 2021). It is crucial that this training also includes topics related to sexual abuse, its impact, and strategies for supporting children who have experienced such trauma. The support and training provided to foster parents should be ongoing, rather than being limited to the beginning of the fostering process (Leontopoulou, 2020). This should include regular check-ins, access to counseling or therapeutic services, continued education opportunities, and availability of updated resources and research findings.

Based on the participant responses, foster parents should have access to strong support networks, which could include other foster parents, support groups, or online communities. These networks can provide emotional support, practical guidance, shared experiences, and a sense of community. Foster parents should be encouraged to prioritize

self-care to prevent burnout and maintain their mental well-being. This could include providing resources or workshops on stress management, mindfulness, or other self-care practices. Support services should recognize and respect the cultural values and traditions of the foster families and incorporate this understanding into the support and training provided. By implementing these recommendations, it is hoped that the well-being of foster parents could be significantly improved, enabling them to provide the best possible care for children who have experienced sexual abuse.

Research questions to explore that could extend the current study include the following:

- How do support services and resources impact the well-being of foster parents caring for children with a history of sexual abuse?
- What are the long-term impacts on foster parents' well-being after fostering children with a history of sexual abuse?
- How does fostering children with a history of sexual abuse impact the foster parents' decision to continue or stop fostering in the future?
- How does the foster parents' perception of their own well-being evolve over time when fostering children with a history of sexual abuse?
- What is the role of therapy or counseling in supporting the well-being of foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse?

Exploring these questions and topics could benefit foster parents and build on knowledge of well-being when fostering children with a history of sexual abuse.

Implications

The findings from this study have several implications for various stakeholders including social services departments, foster care agencies, policy makers, and even the broader community. The findings underscore the importance of providing comprehensive, ongoing support to foster parents, which should be considered in policy development. The reported importance of professional and peer support implies that robust support services should be established. Organizations involved in foster care can use these insights to implement strategies aimed at enhancing foster parent well-being. For example, developing mentorship or buddy programs, organizing regular meetings or workshops, or creating online forums for peer interaction could be considered.

This study also highlights the challenges faced by foster parents, and the societal value they provide. This could be used to advocate for greater public understanding and appreciation of foster parents, potentially leading to increased support and resources. The findings may also guide future research in this area. Researchers could investigate which specific strategies are most effective for supporting foster parent well-being, or examine the impact of different types of support on outcomes for both foster parents and foster children.

In summary, these findings highlight the need for comprehensive, ongoing support for foster parents, both to promote their well-being and to enable them to provide the best possible care for children with a history of sexual abuse. Policymakers, social services departments, foster care agencies, and the broader community all have a role to play in meeting this need.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the well-being of foster parents caring for children with a history of sexual abuse is shaped by a complex interplay of factors. This study shed light on several significant themes including the emotional toll of trauma, the challenge of attachment formation, the importance of professional and peer support, the necessity for effective parenting and coping strategies, the need for comprehensive training, and the impact of fostering on personal and family life. Despite the substantial time, financial, and emotional commitments required, many foster parents reported personal growth, increased resilience, and a deep sense of fulfillment from their role.

These findings underscore the profound commitment and resilience of foster parents, even as they highlight the challenges and stressors they face. They point to the need for a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to supporting foster parents, encompassing enhanced training, ongoing professional and peer support, strategies for self-care, sufficient financial support, family support services, and appreciation for their role. With adequate support and resources, foster parents can not only provide a stable, nurturing environment for children who have experienced sexual abuse, but also experience personal growth and fulfillment. As such, the well-being of foster parents is not just an individual concern, but a societal one, warranting attention, understanding, and action from all of us.

The insights generated by this study are valuable for informing policy decisions, guiding the development of training and support programs, and raising awareness about the experiences and needs of foster parents. Future research is encouraged to delve

further into these areas, exploring ways to enhance the well-being of foster parents and, by extension, improve the outcomes for the children in their care.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

STUDY SEEKS FOSTER PARENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY ABOUT FOSTERING AND WELL-BEING

FOSTER
love
FOSTER
care

My name is Jelenny Marquez and my study is titled “*An Exploration of Well-Being Among Foster Parents of Children with a History of Sexual Abuse.*” I am hoping to explore well-being among foster parents who have fostered children with a history of sexual abuse in the past or currently. I think that by recognizing the factors that lead some to continue to foster and others to stop, changes can be made in the system and/or best practices can be established that might help in parenting foster children.

This research study is part of my dissertation at Walden University.

If you can say yes to all this, you can volunteer for the study:

- You are over the age of 18.
- You are licensed by a licensing fostering agency in the State of Florida.
- You have been a foster parent for at least 6 months.
- You have fostered a child(ren) between the ages of 1 month and 17 years of age.
- You are or have fostered children with a known or documented history of sexual abuse.

If you decide to volunteer for this study:

- You will participate in a one-time 40-60-minute telephone interview.
- Your participation will be kept confidential.
- There is NO cost to you, and you will be reimbursed with a \$15 Target gift card for your participation.

TO VOLUNTEER, PLEASE ACCESS AN INITIAL SURVEY AT:

Walden University’s approval number for this study is 05-02-23-1039329 and it expires on May 1, 2024.



Appendix B: Eligibility Screening

Name of PI: Jelenny Marquez, MS, MPA

IRB #: 05-02-23-1039329

Participant Initials/ID#:

Completion Date:

1. Are you a licensed foster parent in the State of Florida?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Are you currently or recently (within 6 months) fostered a child between the ages of 1 month and 17 years of age who is not related to you?
 - Yes
 - No

3. Has this foster child been in your home for more than 90 days?
 - Yes
 - No

4. Are you primarily English-speaking?
 - Yes
 - No

5. Do you think you would be able to answer general questions about your experiences with well-being while fostering a child with a documented history of sexual abuse?
 - Yes
 - No

6. Do you consider yourself healthy enough to take part in 1-2 interviews that may last 1-2 hours each?
 - Yes
 - No

Appendix C: Demographics Questionnaire

Name of PI: Jelenny Marquez, MS, MPA

IRB #: 05-02-23-1039329

Participant #:

Form Completion Date:

1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your identified gender? Female · Male · Other ·
3. What is your marital status? Single · Married or domestic partnership ·
Separated · Divorced · Widowed ·
4. With which racial or ethnic category do you identify? African American ·
Asian/Pacific Islander · Caucasian · Latino · Other: _____
5. What is your educational background? Did not complete high school · High
school diploma or equivalent · Some college credit, no degree ·
Trade/technical/vocational training · Associate degree · Bachelor's degree ·
Master's degree · Professional degree · Doctorate degree ·
6. What is your current employment history? Unemployed, looking for work ·
Unemployed, not currently looking for work · Unable to work · Self-employed ·
Homemaker · Student · Military · Retired · Part-time · Full-time ·
7. What is your range of household income? Less than \$20,000 · \$20,000 to
\$34,999 · \$35,000 to \$49,999 · \$50,000 to \$74,999 · \$75,000 to \$99,999 ·
Over \$100,000 ·
8. Where do you currently reside? Home (owner) · Home (renter) · Apartment ·
Other ·

9. Religious Affiliation or Preference

Survey Instrument Copyright Jelenny Marquez 2022

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Without mentioning names or identifying details of a child or case, please tell me about your experiences working with the child welfare system.

1. Without mentioning names or identifying details of a child or case, please tell me about your motivation and/or your reasons to foster a child and/or children.
2. Without mentioning names or identifying details of a child or case, what do you find most challenging about supporting children with a history of sexual abuse?
3. From your perspective, how would you characterize/describe your experiences of well-being?
4. Without mentioning names or identifying details of a child or case, from your perspective, please identify any factors that may have impacted your well-being after having fostered a child with a history of sexual abuse.
5. Describe a particularly difficult case and how you worked through it.
6. How did (does) dealing with this difficult case affect your well-being?
7. How does the concept of positive emotion influence your well-being when working with children with a history of sexual abuse?
8. How do engagement and relationship with your foster child(ren) influence your well-being?
9. How does developing relationships and meaning in the work you do with your foster child(ren) influence your well-being?
10. In what ways do you manage stress to improve your well-being? What resources or support do you seek out to improve your well-being?

11. What support do you feel you need from the child-welfare agencies to improve your well-being?