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Retention of Foster Parents for At-Risk Youth in Tennessee

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Abstract

Retention of Foster Parents for At-Risk Youth in Tennessee

by

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MA, Pentecostal Theological Seminary 2014

BS, Lee University 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Federal legislation with the Family First Prevention Service Act (FFPSA) of 2017

required Tennessee to increase foster parent retention strategies. Tennessee does not have

enough available foster homes for adolescents. The purpose of this generic qualitative

study was to explore foster parent retention in Tennessee and to inform policymakers on

how to adapt policy to increase the retention. The theoretical foundation for this study

was based on the policy feedback theory, to identify the policy scope in Tennessee, and

the two-factor theory, to guide the data analysis in the context of employee satisfaction

and retention measures. Purposive sampling techniques were used to recruit 10

participants that met the criteria of having two years of relevant experience successfully

fostering adolescents. Original data were collected from semistructured interviews, field

notes, and a review of Tennessee policy literature. Data triangulation techniques were

employed and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicated 7

themes: (a) foster parent retention is impacted by foster parent compassion; (b) the ability

to seek relevant training and helpful resources; (c) the ability to employ parenting tips

that create success; (d) being an emotionally invested foster parent; (e) having a

meaningful foster parent to foster child relationship; (f) policy that makes provision for

prompt and updated resources; and (g) access to relevant training and instruction.

Implications for positive social change include informing policymakers of the importance

of aligning Tennessee policy with the FFSPA to improve foster parent retention and

improve the health of at-risk youth in Tennessee.

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Dedication

To my wife, Hannah, our children, and my creator.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction and Background

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) or H.R.253 (2018) is one of the most significant pieces of federal legislation to reform foster care policy in decades. FFPSA is consistent with previous policy trajectories created to increase the use of evidence-based practices to limit the amount of time youth spend in foster care and the number of youth placed in a family-style placement, as FFPSA mandates youth be placed in the least restrictive environment necessary. However, though primarily consistent with previous policy, FFPSA emphasizes prevention services to stabilize youth in their family home, which is their home of origin. As Bellonci et al. (2019) pointed out, the target of the FFPSA shifts a majority of Title IV-E funding from out-of-home care to services that prevent youth from entering out-of-home care, such that youth remain in their family setting with support.

This change is significant for child welfare agencies. FFPSA further restricts the use of congregate care services, meaning local governments must increase the number of foster homes because the federal legislation aims to decrease the number of youth in congregate care. Policymakers anticipate FFPSA will improve the quality of health for at-risk youth in foster care by keeping more youth in their home environment, increasing the number of at-risk youth placed in a family-based setting, and decreasing the use of congregate care services. However, there is a shortage of foster homes for at-risk youth across the United States. FFPSA makes provisions for foster parent recruitment services, but more is needed for retention. Child welfare workers need more information on the

factors that influence foster parent retention so that services can be adapted to increase support for foster parents.

Foster parents continue providing services for both intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Ahn et al. (2017) studied foster parent resignation and found there were two primary reasons foster parents discontinue services: lack of support from the agency and a change in the foster parent's lifestyle. Bernedo et al. (2016) reported an intrinsic element influencing foster parent retention by identifying a correlation between foster care placement disruption and the level of emotional connectedness between the foster parent and the foster child.

The relationship between the foster care worker and the foster parent is another example of an intrinsic element. Brown et al. (2014) attributed foster parent retention to the transaction between the resource worker and the foster parent. *Transaction* refers to the professional dynamic between the foster parent and the resource worker. Difficulty in this professional dynamic is one reason foster parents terminate their service (Geiger et al., 2013). While it is not clear how influential a single intrinsic or extrinsic element is on retention, all types of influences can waive a foster parent's decision to either continue or discontinue fostering services. I found that foster parents continue services for extrinsic reasons such as training quality, financial support, clearly written policy, and caseworker support. Additionally, foster parents continue services for intrinsic motivations such as altruism, self-efficacy, and feelings of connectedness.

For the successful implementation of FFPSA, states must adapt foster care policy infrastructure by changing policy to support the retention of foster parents willing to

parent at-risk youth. This qualitative phonological study generated data for policymakers in Tennessee. This study may influence positive social change by providing policy recommendations that affect foster parent retention in Tennessee, increasing the number of available family-style placements for at-risk youth to decrease the use of congregate care services for adolescents and increase the quality of health for at-risk youth. In this chapter, I provide the (a) problem statement; (b) purpose of the study; (c) research questions; (d) theoretical framework; (e) nature of the study; (f) list of definitions; (g) assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; (h) significance of the study; and (i) a chapter summary.

Problem Statement

Tennessee has an inadequate policy to support the retention of foster parents willing to parent at-risk youth. This study was focused on contributing information to policy stakeholders in Tennessee to increase foster parent retention in Tennessee. Primarily, Tennessee has an insufficient number of foster homes. In 2018, the Tennessee Department of Children's Services (2020) reported in their annual report that there were 4,077 youth placed in a congregate care-type placement and only 2,921 available foster. This shortage has increased the use of congregate care services, adversely affecting adolescent health (Child Trends, 2015; Crum, 2010; Day et al., 2018; Tennessee Alliance, 2016; U.S. Children's Bureau, 2015). Currently, state and private agencies are developing a culture to facilitate connectedness between workers and foster parents to explore the impact of increased monetary support for foster parents, allocate more funds for foster parent recruitment, increase foster parents' exposure to training, and increase

the support to foster parent resource workers (Ahn et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2014; Geiger et al., 2013). Tennessee reports having more than 9,000 youth in care, with only 4,000 foster homes available to serve those youth. More foster homes are needed to transition youth out of congregate care.

Nationally, the recruitment rate of foster parents is behind the growth rate of youth in foster care (Bernedo et al., 2016; Day et al., 2018; Koh et al., 2014). This lack of foster families impacts adolescents' psychological well-being because they reside in congregate care longer than necessary, are placed in emergency shelters/temporary placements, and experience a high number of placement changes (Bernedo et al., 2016; Day et al., 2018). A dearth of adequate policies to support foster home retention may contribute to the problem.

A review of the literature showed a strong correlation between foster parent retention and the following factors: case worker relationship, monetary support, support from the agency, and foster parent influence on major decisions (Ahn et al., 2017; Bernedo et al., 2016; Crum, 2010; Geiger et al., 2013; Koh et al., 2014; Pac, 2017). Researchers have examined foster parent retention from the foster parents' perspectives in other parts of the United States and in Canada, but not in Tennessee. The current study helps fill this gap by contributing to the body of knowledge needed to address the problem and by providing data to public policy decision makers in Tennessee.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the retention of long-term foster parents willing to parent at-risk adolescents in Tennessee. I conducted the study to inform public

policy by exploring the retention of long-term foster parents ready to parent at-risk youth ages 13–17. I employed generic qualitative inquiry techniques. The theoretical framework used in the study was policy feedback theory (PFT). I collected pertinent data to inform policymakers in Tennessee who may be able to adapt policy to increase the retention rate of foster parents while increasing the quality of health for adolescents (see Ahn et al., 2017; Bernedo et al., 2016; Crum, 2010; Geiger et al., 2013; Koh et al., 2014; Pac, 2017).

Research Question

The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: How do foster parents who parent at-risk youth experience retention?

Research Question 2: How can foster parent experiences shape Tennessee policy to promote foster parent retention more effectively?

Theoretical Framework

I integrated PFT (Weible & Sabatier, 2018) with Herzberg et al.'s (2017) two-factor theory. PFT and two-factor theory help explain Tennessee policy in the context of foster parent retention. The PFT framework allows a researcher to consider the exchange between people and existing policies and to study the development of future policy (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). Two-factor theory aims to increase employee productivity by decreasing employee turnover (Herzberg et al., 2017). Although foster parents are not employees, they are contracted by an agency to provide services. The nature of the relationship between the foster parent and the agency has similar constructs as those

between an employee and an employer. For example, the agency must supervise the foster parent, provide coaching, maintain a file on the foster parent, and issue discipline. In addition, the agency provides expectations for the foster parents to satisfy.

In this study, I explained and analyzed the data in the context of two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 2017) by exploring existing policy's economic and social influence (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). I analyzed the exchange between federal and state policies concerning Tennessee's foster care community. PFT helped me deliver recommendations to foster care policymakers in Tennessee.

Nature of the Study

I incorporated research techniques from generic qualitative inquiry for this study. Rudestam and Newton (2015) described qualitative inquiry as a way to understand human experience from the perspectives of those living those experiences. More specifically, Patton (2015) described generic qualitative inquiry as an approach to understand the human experience outside the constructs of a particular theoretical framework. Before selecting generic qualitative inquiry, I eliminated phenomenology and case study approaches. According to Rudestam and Newton (2015), phenomenology is the study of how humans make sense of experience on a deep, personal, unconscious, and emotional level. Phenomenology did not fit my study because I was collecting information about people and their experiences and relating that information externally to others. Rudestam and Newton (2015) described case study as a research approach focused on one unique element. While I was focused on foster parents as a single subject, the case study approach did not apply to my inquiry because I was exploring experiences

of more than one foster parent. Percy et al. (2015) described generic qualitative inquiry as advantageous in situations in which people's subjective experiences within their environment are explored and the information collected is applied to understand a phenomenon apart from the participant. I explored the experiences of foster parents in the child welfare community in Tennessee to understand foster parent retention in Tennessee. Therefore, I chose a generic qualitative inquiry as the most appropriate method to address the research purpose.

The target population for this study was foster parents who have fostered at-risk youth for at least 2 years. Foster parents were required to have experience working with at-risk youth who met this study's definition of at-risk youth. Creswell (2009) described purposeful (purposive) sampling as a technique in which s researcher recruits specific participants to help make sense of the problem and research question. I used purposive sampling for this study through one foster care agency in Tennessee. My target number of participants was 10 to 15. I recruited 10 foster parent participants. I collected data using a researcher-developed interview guide vetted by an expert panel. My data analysis strategy was informed by LaPelle (2004) and Rubin and Rubin (2012). I transcribed interviews using Temi, an advanced speech recognition software. I coded data using a three-tier coding method and organized data by theme, sorted by subtheme, and then compared the data using cross-sectional analysis (Patton, 2015). I used qualitative data analysis software to help analyze the data.

Definitions

At-risk youth: In context, describes youth who may be at risk of any of the following: between ages 10 and 17 and placed in foster care, age of 18 aging out of foster care, human trafficking, sex trafficking, sexual activities as an adolescent, teen pregnancy, teen parenting, drug and alcohol use, being a child born to a teen parent or a parent who is in foster care, youth who reside in congregate care, youth who live in a homeless shelter, youth who are homeless, and youth who need to be adopted (Administration for Children and Families, 2018).

Family-style placement: Placement with a single family including at least one parent, such as a foster home (Administration for Children and Families, 2018).

Policy effects: A policy's economic and social outcomes, may be positive or negative (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). Positive effects encourage the continuation of a policy trajectory; adverse effects are indicative of divergent policy development.

Power groups: Stakeholders who feel the effects of a policy (Skjærseth, 2018). A shift in stakeholder values increases the risk of divergent policy.

Assumptions

Methodological assumptions are assumed truths by a researcher that shape the research design, influence data interpretation, and impact social implications (Creswell, 2013). I identified several assumptions at the beginning of this study. First, I assumed the data would be a fair representation of the foster parent population in Tennessee. As data saturation was reached with 10 participants, the data likely represent the larger foster parent population in Tennessee. Another assumption was that foster parents would be

willing to share vulnerable information for this study. The foster parent participants were helpful in sharing intimate stories from their experiences that provided rich data for the study. Foster parents shared stories regarding their foster care and adoption experiences, the success of foster parenting, and failed foster parenting experiences. My third assumption was that the qualitative methodology was the most appropriate approach to explain the experiences of foster parents in a meaningful way to policy stakeholders. I completed a rich analysis of the data collected using qualitative methodology. The final assumption for this study was that, although I did not directly measure health improvements among adolescents in foster care, increasing the retention of foster parents would improve the quality of health for at-risk youth in foster care. These assumptions helped me develop and define the research questions and narrow the research design.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations are research elements controlled by a researcher that also restrain the influence of the study (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). I limited participants to foster parents in East Tennessee. I excluded foster parents with fewer than 2 years of experience as a foster parent, although there may be successful foster parents who care for youth with less experience. Foster parents who had a history of frequently disrupting youth from their home were also excluded from the study. I required a professional recommendation from the foster parents' affiliated agency to allow them to participate in this study and to validate the success of the foster parent participants. I did not explore foster parent retention in terms of parenting style or parent–child attachment; instead, I examined foster parent retention by exploring the experiences of foster parents. Data

saturation was achieved from 10 participant interviews. Further, this study may be transferrable to another context due to the consistent nature of the relationship between foster parents, at-risk youth, and foster care policy in other regions of Tennessee.

Limitations

Limitations are elements influencing the study that are beyond the control of a researcher (Ruestam & Newton, 2015). There are limitations to every study. A successful research design includes a practical response to the limitations. I limited my study to the geographical region of East Tennessee because of the gap in the literature review, which is that there is insufficient research to explain the retention of foster parents in Tennessee. Expanding the geographical region and increasing the number of participants would increase the transferability of the findings. However, that was not a practical strategy for this study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) expressed that for all practical purposes, every study has an end point. Data saturation is the point at which no new data or themes develop during analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 266). Thus, data collection should conclude at the point of data saturation. Data saturation was expected between 10 and 12 participants in this study. I experienced data saturation at 10 participants for this study, as evidenced by reoccurring themes in the data collected from participant interviews. For example, when asked why they provide foster parenting services, seven foster parents reported feelings of compassion as their main reason.

Another limitation was the research-developed data collection tool, which is not evidence based. While the tool is not evidence based, my instrument was reviewed by experts. A third limitation was that the data were collected and interpreted from my

context as a child welfare worker and administrator in East Tennessee. I managed researcher bias using data triangulation methods. Research dependability is often challenging in qualitative studies. Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested researchers use data triangulation methods to increase dependability. I triangulated data from the following resources: (a) in-depth, in-person semi-structured interviews; (b) Tennessee state policy literature; and (c) field notes. Data triangulation helped to increase the dependability of the research and identify findings.

Significance

The findings of this study may have implications for positive social change through public policy application for the Department of Children's Services in Tennessee and foster care provider agencies. This research project was unique because I sought to explain foster parent retention from the perspectives of long-term foster parents. The information collected informs foster parent recruitment and retention policies/practices in Tennessee in light of FFPSA. I believed that with appropriate policy changes, the number of foster parents willing to parent adolescents may increase. An increase in the number of available foster parents may lead to more placement options for at-risk adolescents. Further, Tennessee could reduce the use of congregate care services by increasing the number of foster parents. With an increase in placement options, foster care workers may be more selective with placement decisions to help secure healthier placements for youth. Increasing stability for foster youth is likely to reduce the threat of system trauma. *System trauma* refers to a traumatic experience among these youth caused by the youth's experience in the child welfare system. System trauma may be caused by multiple youth

transitions, abuse from peers and adults that occurs while the youth is in the system, emotional stress inflicted by the system, lack of healthy attachment to a caregiver, loss of personal identity, and unhealthy habits the youth learn from other peers and adults in the system (Koh et al., 2014). Overall, an increase in the number of available foster parents is likely to increase placement stability, reduce system trauma, and improve the foster youth's overall health.

Summary

The research problem addressed in this study was the inadequate number of foster parents in Tennessee. Tennessee needs more foster homes to accommodate the placement of at-risk youth and the FFPSA. To improve foster children's health, foster care workers need more options when placing children in foster homes that are not congregate care settings, crowded foster homes, or emergency placements. Placement stability may decrease system trauma for foster youth. Foster care workers need a large selection of foster homes to make culturally informed foster care placements.

In Chapter 1, I identified the shortage of foster homes in Tennessee. In Chapter 2, I present the findings from the literature review. For the literature review, I completed an exhaustive review of foster care literature and Tennessee policy to use as a data source for this study to identify a gap in the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to address the inadequate number of foster parents who parent at-risk youth in Tennessee. Federal legislation in 2018 required states to decrease the use of congregate care services (Administration for Children and Families, 2018). However, the shortage of foster parents is increasing the use of congregate care services (Child Trends, 2015; Crum, 2010; Day et al., 2018; Tennessee Alliance, 2016; U.S. Children's Bureau, 2015). Therefore, I evaluated foster parent retention to inform policy stakeholders in Tennessee. If foster care providers can retain foster parents, the number of available foster parents should increase. The literature review encompasses a broad explanation of foster parent retention. Foster parents continue or discontinue services due to outcomes of private affairs, institutional influences, and inability to cope with parenting stress. This chapter includes (a) a description of the literature search strategy, (b) an explanation of the theoretical foundation, (c) the conceptual framework, (d) the literature review, and (d) the summary and conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

A literature matrix is a researcher's tool to log findings from reviewed material. I used a literature matrix in Microsoft Excel with the following headings: reference citation, year of publication, theme, subtheme, relevance to the research topic, theory and research design notes, and meaningful quotes. I collected three to five notable quotes from each source. In the initial search, I identified 75 articles and selected 43 based on their relevance to the research question. Most articles published before 2013 were

excluded. I completed the literature search using the Walden University library databases, the Google search engine, and Google Scholar. I explored pertinent dissertations using the ProQuest database. Lastly, I used the U.S. Children's Bureau's website to locate policy updates and information. The keywords used during the search were *foster parent retention, recruitment, foster parent discontinuation of services, foster parent continuation of benefits, parenting at-risk youth, child welfare policy, two-factor theory, phenomenology,* and *policy feedback theory*. During the search, I used the terms *foster care* and *foster care provider* to supplement *foster parents*.

Theoretical Framework

Most studies in the literature review address foster parent retention from a clinical or recruiting perspective. The lens used in this study was a combination of two theories: two-factor theory and PFT. Two-factor theory is a business management theory addressing employee retention and satisfaction. Two-factor theory provides a relevant viewpoint to foster parent retention because it allows elements of foster parent retention to be related to concepts of employee retention. PFT addresses the public policy process and connects research to policy development. Both the two-factor theory and PFT are explained in the following sections.

Two-Factor Theory

Two-factor theory is a business management approach to help understand employee satisfaction. The theory was developed by Herzberg (as cited in Sachau, 2007) and is also known as the *dual-factor theory* and *motivation–hygiene theory*. The concept behind two-factor theory is that an employer can increase employee productivity by

decreasing turnover, decreasing absenteeism, and improving the employee–employer relationship (Herzberg et al., 2017). Herzberg (as cited in Sachau, 2007) found that to increase employee efficiency, the employer must increase satisfying (motivators) events and decrease dissatisfying (hygiene) events. The two fundamental elements of two-factor theory are motivation and hygiene factors. Shannon (2017) described motivation as intrinsic values or perceptions of the employee, while hygiene factors are job conditions. Some examples of motivation factors are feelings of achievement, recognition, and a sense of responsibility. Hygiene factors include company policy, work conditions, and supervisor relationships with subordinates. Herzberg discussed motivation and hygiene factors independently (Herzberg et al., 2017). In summary, two-factor theory provides a framework to measure employee satisfaction by analyzing employee attitudes against motivation and hygiene factors. Next, I discuss the use of the two-factor theory in practice and justify its inclusion in this study.

Kotni and Karumuri (2018) designed a study to identify motivation factors for a salesforce team, understanding that a more motivated sales team would increase sales and earn customer loyalty. Kotni and Karumuri developed a research instrument to measure hygiene and motivation factors of the sales team. According to Kotni and Karumuri, the salesforce team was motivated by work conditions, sales incentives, the condition of the facility, sales contests, company policy, and company procedures. The same team was less motivated by peer relationships, employment terms and conditions, annual salary raises, and job security (Kotni & Karumuri, 2018). The executive leaders used the data generated by two-factor theory to design a salesperson incentive program to increase

productivity. The information was practical to the company and shaped the face of the company positively by increasing productivity. To explain the retention of foster parents who parent at-risk youth, a similar approach is needed in Tennessee. Therefore, I integrated the two-factor theory into the framework of my study to explain the retention of foster parents in Tennessee. Next, I discuss the constructs of PFT.

Policy Feedback Theory

PFT is one theory that may be used to explain the nature of public policy. PFT emerged in the 1980s as a theory to explain how public policy shapes both the public and the political landscape and to explain how the political landscape shapes public policy (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). PFT is unique because it helps researchers explain how policies influence the political agenda for existing and future policies. If a local government issues a public policy (e.g., Infrastructure 1) to alleviate stress on public infrastructure, PFT may be used to help explain the existing policy, the shifting political climate, and emerging infrastructure policy. The influence of the policy may transcend that of public infrastructure and may change the political landscape. For example, if Infrastructure 1 designated significant funding to construction companies for 20 years, the local area may see a considerable increase in construction companies, which may represent a more significant percentage of the population politically. In turn, the construction companies may end up lobbying a higher percentage of the local government's budget than they would receive without the additional support. PFT can help explain how policies influence the political climate and affect policymaking (Weible & Sabatier, 2018).

According to Weible and Sabatier (2018), PFT is influenced by the work of Schattschneider (1935), who was an early 20th-century political scientist known for saying "policies create politics" (p. 105). Schattschneider (as cited in Brown et al., 2014; Mair, 1997) struggled to grasp how politics in the United States would adapt to a growing population in the information age. Schattschneider (1948) was a pluralist who argued that the fundamental political coping mechanism for the United States is the development of party government so that citizens can be employed to share power and decisions. To Schattschneider, a political scheme is driven by the art and appreciation of conflict. Schattschneider (as cited in Mair, 1997) described conflict as a democratic staple to policy innovation.

Schattschneider felt convicted about the failing responsibilities of the citizen and co-authored a book called *A Guide to the Study of Public Affairs* (1952) with Victor Jones and Stephen K. Bailey. The book serves as a training guide to teach citizens how to verify information and political plots. In the book, the authors describe a body of people enacting policy change called *pressure groups*. Pressure groups are people who represent their biased objectives to the government by presenting information to elected officials and the public (Schattschneider, 1952). Schattschneider understood politics as an interconnected social system operating in a constant conflict that drives political progress. The conflict is not the downfall, but the rift that keeps the current moving. The people influence the political landscape because the people elect the officials, hold government officials accountable, and spark interest in developing new policies. The new policies

may influence political change. There are clear representations of Schattschneider's political philosophy represented in PFT.

The primary function of PFT is to understand the feedback effects of policy on the political landscape (Hafer, 2017). Policy analysts study policy effects by comparing the economic benefits of governments to the beneficial outcomes for citizens (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). Policy effects can be positive or negative. While many consider the general benefits of a policy for the citizen, it is also essential to consider how the policy affects citizens' behaviors and attitudes and how those attitudes may mobilize support for policy change (Campbell, 2012). Positive policy feedback indicates a continuation of the policy trajectory, while negative policy indicates a divergent policy trajectory (Fernandez & Jaime-Castillo, 2013). Policy feedback effects help explain policy change. Nowlin (2016) made sense of the policy feedback phenomenon with an earthquake analogy describing policy feedback as an aftershock of a political subsystem. In Nowlin's analogy, the aftershock influences policy change. Nowlin identified the political subsystem as the beliefs and values of the stakeholders. Policy change can result from a shift in the beliefs and values of the policy stakeholders.

There are four points of inquiry in PFT. PFT allows a policy to be analyzed from a historical perspective, a governmental perspective, a citizen's perspective, and from the standpoint of power groups (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). In my study, I aimed to understand PFT's policy feedback effects from the perspective of power groups. The following example demonstrates the role of power groups in PFT. Skjærseth (2018) reported on the European Union's collaboration on climate and energy policy from a PFT

perspective. Skjærseth described policy feedback as the reciprocal influence of current policy on policy stakeholders and clarified the influential dynamic power groups have on policy change. In Skjærseth's narrative, the power group was burdened by the economic outcome of the current energy policy. The burden was presented to policy stakeholders, which resulted in a change in the stakeholders' values. This created negative feedback for the existing energy policy, creating a divergent policy. Skjærseth's work provides an excellent example of how power groups can shape policy. The author illustrated the role of policy analysis from the perspective of power groups: the power groups were unsatisfied with the current energy policy, which resulted in negative policy feedback.

More work can be done in the field of PFT to understand why policy stakeholders respond to policy change. For example, Campbell (2012) described a policy change in the United States with the Medicare system in 2003 that allowed a prescription drug benefit program through private insurance programs. Despite the concession in the policy, the change did not influence the attitude of the constituents, although the policy seemed to favor constituents' needs (Campbell, 2012). Policy trajectory is more complicated than projecting which outcome has the most significant influence on the citizen. According to Campbell, constituents' attitudes about the policy may be more influenced by political groups than the direct benefits of the policy. While more information is needed to understand the implications of how a policy shapes citizens' attitudes, understanding those implications can empower policymakers to be more efficient for governments by cutting waste and being more sensitive to the needs of stakeholders.

PFT does not apply only to energy policy. Hafer (2017) attested to the broad applicability of PFT to many public offices: social security, the G.I. Bill, welfare, criminal justice, agriculture, and performance management in public administration. PFT applies to a broad range of public policy problems. I used the theoretical lens of PFT to analyze the perspectives of power groups in child welfare. The power group observed in my study included foster parents in East Tennessee.

Conceptual Framework

More information is needed to understand why foster parents continue and discontinue services for foster youth in Tennessee. Data are limited on this phenomenon as they relate to foster parents who provide services in Tennessee. Much of the literature reviewed for my study explored foster parent retention against parenting styles, social needs, recruitment strategies, psychological influences on foster parents' decision to provide services, and foster parent satisfaction. The current study was different from those presented in the literature review because, for my conceptual framework, I used a co-theory model to join two-factor theory with PFT. Two-factor theory explains retention from the perspective of an individual's level of motivation and satisfaction, while PFT explains the influence of power groups on policy change and the effect of policy change on future political dynamics. Figure 1 depicts the co-joined theory applied with the generic qualitative inquiry model, which created a proper lens to explore foster parent retention to provide data to policy stakeholders in Tennessee. Data generated from the research were filtered through two-factor theory. The ideas generated from two-factor theory were applied to PFT. After policy effects were identified from the power group,

the data were analyzed and synthesized in perspective to the relative elements of FFPSA.

The research goal of my study was to explain foster parent retention. The data can inform

public policy to increase foster parent retention rates through policy change. An increase

in foster parent retention rates may increase placement stability in Tennessee, which may,

in turn, increase the overall health of at-risk youth.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

Generic Qualitative Inquiry	• Data collected from power groups, policy literature, and field notes.
Policy Feedback Theory	• The data is sythensized and analyzed with policy feedback theory.
Two-Factor Theory	• The data is sythensized and analyzed with two-factor theory.
Policy Effects	• Policy recommendations to policy stakeholders in Tennessee.
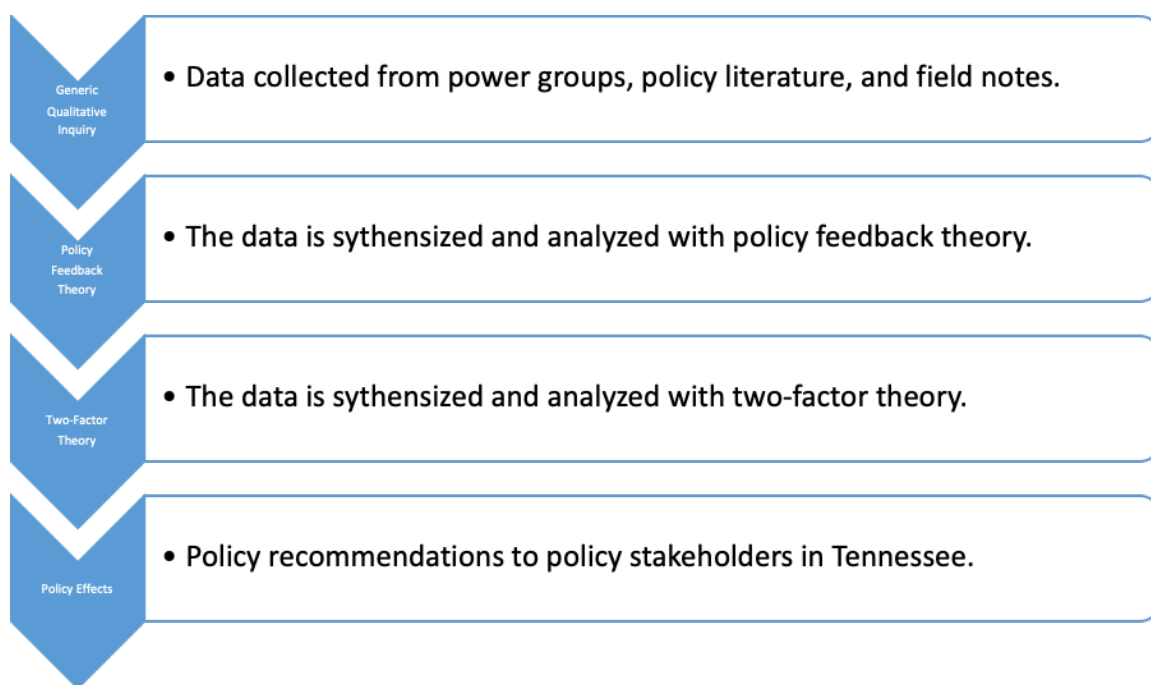
Literature Review

This literature review is divided into two sections. In the first section, I discuss

two-factor theory, including hygiene factors and motivation factors. I found the following

concepts relevant to my study under hygiene: (a) the influence of research, (b) the

influence of training, and (c) the influence of policy. I found the following motivation

concepts to be relevant to my study: (a) altruism, (b) self-efficacy, and (c) connectedness. In the second section, I identify two concepts relevant to my study under PFT: (a) positive feedback effects and (b) negative feedback effects. In each section, I discuss factors influencing foster parent retention, also called continuation and discontinuation of services. The final section includes a summary of interpretations from the literature review from both theoretical perspectives.

Herzberg's two-factor theory was developed to understand employee retention. Two-factor theory places retention factors in two basic categories: hygiene and motivation. Hygiene factors refer to external influences on employee retention in the workplace. Hygiene factors may be present in workplace culture or workplace environment. Motivation factors are internal influences on employee retention and are driven by the subjective goals and values of the employee. In the following sections, I present specific data from the literature review integrating two-factor theory with foster care data.

Hygiene Factors

Herzberg categorized hygiene elements as extrinsic factors having a low impact on satisfaction directly; however, the absence of hygiene factors contributes to dissatisfaction (Kotni & Karumuri, 2018). Extrinsic elements include administrative policy, supervision style, management techniques, agency culture, and personal growth (Kotni & Karumuri, 2018; Sachau, 2007). The hygiene concept in two-factor theory helps synthesize the literature to better understand foster parent retention. The literature suggested multiple reasons foster parents continue to provide services to at-risk youth.

The reasons may be grouped as administrative factors and collaboration factors. Administrative factors can influence a foster parent's level of dissatisfaction. The administrative elements identified in the literature are institutional concerns such as the impact of (a) research development, (b) training requirements, and (c) policy.

Impact of Research

Researchers are calling for more data to help foster care stakeholders improve foster parent satisfaction in the fostering role (Brown et al., 2009). There is a concern with the volume and quality of research data. Feldman et al. (2016) called for more research on the condition of foster parents who parent at-risk youth. Researchers have highlighted little research to understand the dynamic between foster parents and at-risk youth (Cooley & Petren, 2011).

Professionals advocate for more data specifically related to foster parent retention. Munford and Sanders (2016) drew attention to their study, citing examples of how research influences foster parents. For example, the authors explained that youth who retain stability in a foster home placement are likely to be more emotionally healthy compared to those who experience transitions (Munford & Sanders, 2016). Munford and Sanders (2016) found unconditional love an essential foster parent quality that enabled stable placements. Therefore, foster parents who embody the ability to care for at-risk youth unconditionally experience satisfaction. Research is necessary to ensure competency in many areas of child welfare, especially regarding foster parent retention.

Impact of Training

Researchers have attributed foster parent satisfaction to the foster parents' training experience. In one study, Cooley and Petren (2011) reported that an increase in training quality lowered the number of placement disruptions, increased the communication style between foster care providers and agency workers, and improved the quality of the relationship between the foster parent and the at-risk youth. Tennessee experienced these results after revising the state's foster parent training program in 2004. Tennessee included more training topics and required additional hours relevant to meeting the needs of at-risk youth. Alpert and Meezan (2012) reported on the project's outcome in Tennessee. Tennessee experienced a decline in congregate care placements and increased use of family home settings. Font (2015) complemented the study in Tennessee by examining factors of placement stability for high-risk youth and kinship placements. Font conducted archival research and reviewed 52,752 foster care cases in Wisconsin. In the study, seven types of placements applied to nonrelative foster care and kinship placements (Font, 2015). After the analysis, Font determined high-risk youth in kinship placements suffered from disruptions at a similar rate to nonrelative placements (Font, 2015). Font concluded that more training would help to bring stability to placements.

Training is essential to prepare foster parents for their work. Brown et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of relevant training topics. Brown et al. conducted a study using concept mapping to collect information about foster parents' needs. The study helped child welfare leaders to increase the quality of the training material because they had relevant information about the needs of foster parents. Foster parent training affects

retention; however, training is not the only element affecting retention. Next, I share information on the relationship between policy and foster parent retention.

Impact of Policy

There are many examples of how public policy can influence the outcomes of a system. The Brian A. v. Haslam settlement is one important example in Tennessee (Alpert & Meezan, 2012). This class action suit argued that Tennessee failed to place foster youth appropriately, leading to overcrowding of congregate care placements. The suit was settled in 2001. A significant outcome of the settlement required Tennessee to reduce the use of congregate care placements. Alpert and Meezan (2012) attested to Tennessee's success on several factors, one of which was the influence of foster care policy. Tennessee developed a policy to help prevent unmonitored congregate care placements and to increase the rate at which foster youth transition to a family setting (Alpert & Meezan, 2012). Lastly, Alpert and Meezan concluded that policy change influenced foster parent retention and changes in the practices of foster care workers. Policy changes in Tennessee influenced foster parent retention, and foster parent retention reduced the number of congregate care placements.

Policy's influence on child welfare outcomes continues to be a driving force among advocates and policymakers. In 2018, the United States Congress passed Federal Bill H.R. 253, commonly known as the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). Essentially, the FFSPA redirects federal funding to state foster care programs so that more funding is allocated to prevention services and less funding is provided to congregate care. The FFSPA may increase the number of foster youth placed in a family-

based setting and decrease the utilization of congregate care placements nationwide. This example highlights the role of policy in helping foster care agencies meet objectives in FFSPA. According to Alpert and Meezan, Tennessee reduced congregate care placements by developing new policies to increase the retention rate of foster parents who parent at-risk youth. In Tennessee, policy changes directly influenced the quality of service foster parents provided to at-risk youth. In retrospect, the Brian A. settlement placed Tennessee ahead in terms of alignment with the FFSPA.

Foster parents attribute many foster parenting hardships to the need for the system to be reformed, explicitly calling for restructuring with financial support (Geiger et al., 2013). Madden et al. (2016) conducted a study to explore the role of respite services on foster parent retention. The authors used a cross-sectional survey to generate data on the foster parents' experience with respite services. The data suggested that respite services are essential to foster parent retention. Madden et al. called for policymakers to use the data to increase foster parent retention by increasing respite services. Cooley and Petren (2011) provided another example of how policy can positively influence foster parents' perspectives. Cooley and Petren completed a study to analyze the influence of foster parent training on the foster parent experience. According to Cooley and Petren, foster parents were generally unsatisfied with the foster care policy, describing it as being disconnected from the foster care provider.

In another study, Cooley et al. (2015) continued to describe a worsening relationship between foster parents and child welfare policy. The authors reported that foster parents generally described foster care policy as being against the foster care

provider. The findings are disheartening because foster parents can find confidence in foster care policy; however, they struggle to believe it is created in their best interest. Researchers agree that foster parents believe the policy is both the problem and the answer for child welfare. According to Whenan et al. (2009), unsatisfied foster parents are unlikely to continue providing foster parent services. Repairing the relationship between foster parents and policymakers is vital to increasing foster parent retention. Next, I explore administrative factors related to foster parent retention.

The literature has affirmed that foster care research generally benefits foster parent retention. The more research that is available to help policy stakeholders understand the foster parenting role, the better equipped the stakeholder will be to shape policy for foster parents constructively. The Tennessee example validates the relationship between foster parent training and retention. Training equips foster parents to care for at-risk youth, and an increase in skills increases the level of satisfaction. Satisfied foster parents are more likely to continue services. Lastly, foster parents place confidence in the role policy plays in their success but call for more collaboration between policymakers and foster parents. Where policy should improve the quality of the foster parent experience, policy complicates the system.

Impact of Agency Support

The literature revealed a clear association between agency support and foster parent retention. I noticed a unique link between culture and placement stability. In situations where the agency understood the culture of the foster parents, the agency was able to make a more satisfying placement. If there is a single drive causing foster parents

to discontinue services, it is poor communication with their supporting agency. Lastly, the literature review indicated a strong association between foster parent support and retention.

Culture can influence foster parent retention. Brown et al. (2009) used concept mapping to employ quantitative analysis of qualitative data in their study on the influence of culture and placement of foster youth. The researchers collected data by asking participants open-ended questions and sorting the data. The researchers recruited participants from licensed foster homes. Brown et al. (2009) made a striking discovery and reported more stable placements in situations where the foster youth's culture overlapped with that of the foster home. Shared beliefs explained placement stability and satisfaction between the foster youth and the foster parent. Foster parent training includes hours of cultural awareness to prepare the agency work and the foster parent to understand the role culture plays in placement stability (Cooley & Petren, 2011).

Findings from authors like Brown et al. (2009), however, suggest that placement workers are not making culturally informed placement decisions. Font (2015) resonated with the idea of culturally informed placements after studying the influence of cultural awareness on placement stability between kinship and nonkinship placement. Font (2015) concluded that there are fewer requests for placement moves among kinship placements than nonkinship placements. The success of stability among kinship placements is credited to the cultural overlap between the foster family and the foster youth. Brown et al. and Font agreed that cultural overlap nurtured a more meaningful relationship between the foster family and foster youth, promoting placement stability. Culturally informed

placements may help improve foster parent retention by increasing placement stability and foster parent satisfaction.

Not all authors attribute placement stability to shared cultural values. Crum (2010) drew a different conclusion from Brown et al. (2009) and Font (2015). Crum's study also included licensed foster homes. Crum collected data using the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory and the Parent Alliance Measure and analyzed the data using post hoc multiple regression techniques to test variables. Crum found a strong correlation between placement stability and parenting factors. Crum discovered that parents who have support and are effective at setting limits are more likely to experience placement stability (pp. 188, 190). Crum did not explore the influence of culture in his study. Similarly, Brown et al. (2009) and Font (2015) did little to explore parenting techniques in their work. Neither Brown et al. (2009), Crum (2010), nor Font (2015) disagreed with the notion that placement stability impacts foster parent retention.

Support is the most reoccurring theme in literature when reviewing foster parent retention. Foster parent support is a broad topic. Ahn et al. (2017) defined support as "resources, training, services, and the foster parent's relationship with agency workers" (p. 479). I identified various types of foster parent support in the literature review, including consistent agency support, good communication with agency workers, resources for youth medical needs, foster parent training, respite services, transportation services, and financial support. I classified these types of support as hygiene facts in the two-factor theory. Denlinger and Dorius (2018) found that 40% of foster parents discontinue services due to inadequate agency support. Day et al. (2018) advocated for

foster parent retention after finding that 55% of youth in foster care experience three moves or more; after some youth transition from the foster parent's home, the foster parent discontinued services (p. 152). With nearly 500,000 children in foster care in the United States, every good foster home is vital. Improving foster parent retention begins with improving support to foster parent providers.

Impact of Communication

Communication between agency workers and foster parents is understood to significantly influence foster parent retention. Denlinger and Dorius (2018) dedicated their research to communication strategies. The authors collected data to explore the relationship between communication quality and placement stability. The authors collected data from four sources: in-depth qualitative interviews, an Internet-based questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and postanalysis member checks. The study was unique because the authors incorporated active and inactive foster mothers to generate data. The authors interviewed caseworkers and concluded that communication between the foster parents and the agency workers was the most influential variable impacting foster parent retention.

Denlinger and Dorius made helpful recommendations as to how agency communication can positively influence communication: (a) caseworkers should be knowledgeable of resources and be available to share those resources with foster parents; (b) information about placement, appointments, and services should be provided to the foster parents on time; (c) foster parents prefer a friendly and professional communication style; (d) foster parents should feel respected after communicating with

caseworkers; and (e) caseworkers and foster parents must understand their roles in context to their relationship as partnership helping at-risk youth (pp. 3–8). Communication between the foster parent and agency workers is complex. Understanding the latitude of communication on foster parent retention can help identify ways to improve the quality of experience between the agency worker and the foster parent.

Communication as an element influencing foster parent retention is not limited to the transaction between the foster parent and the case worker. While researchers like Ahn et al. (2017) argued that communication may influence foster parent retention and create stability for foster youth, Mihalo et al. (2016) argued that the communication dynamic is complex, including the foster parent, the agency worker, and the agency administrators. Agency administrators should develop a culture that connects foster parents and administrators, includes foster parents in quality improvement meetings, and connects agency personnel and foster parents in foster parent support groups (Mihalo et al., 2016). Communication is much more complex than simply placing a phone call, sending a text message, or typing an email; communication is personalized, thoughtful, timely, professional, relevant, clear, and essential to retain foster parent providers. The supervising agency responds by facilitating healthy communication techniques, which should be a component of the agency's culture. To increase retention, agency workers may profit from increasing communication strategies. Communication helps foster parents interpret their satisfaction with the agency and the foster parenting experience.

Impact of Caseworker

Foster parents primarily measure agency support by their experiences with the agency caseworker (Geiger et al., 2013). Geiger et al. (2013) studied foster parent retention and satisfaction trends. The author used a mixed-methods triangulation design. The researchers organized the data into three primary categories: influences to continue or discontinue fostering, foster parent perceptions on continuing or discontinuing fostering services, and exploring why foster parents decided to continue services after resigning (Geiger et al., 2013). In their literature review, Geiger et al. listed many variables and the following hygiene variables affecting retention: foster parent uncertainty with their role, foster parent's lack of influence in making case decisions, foster parent's need for social support, financial support to help the foster parent meet the needs of the youth, and services to meet the treatment needs of the youth. The researchers recruited 649 foster parents and used logistic regression to analyze the relationship between the variables.

Geiger et al. (2013) collected data using open-ended questions and surveys. The data indicated a need for more practical supports for foster parents. Many foster parents described a strained system stating that policies must be revised so that agencies can provide better support. Foster parents need more support from the agency case worker, treatment services and resources, and a more flexible schedule among service providers. The results indicated that foster parents stop providing foster parent services because the system does not provide them with adequate tools. Whenan et al. (2009) provided an appropriate example of foster parent frustrations. Whenan et al. concluded that foster

parents with adequate training are more equipped to meet the needs of the foster youth, feel more satisfied, are less frustrated, and are more likely to continue being foster parents. Policy stakeholders need more information about foster parents' perceptions of support to create policies to contribute to the longevity of foster parent retention. Understanding the relationship between agency workers and the foster parent is vital to understanding foster parent retention.

Understanding the dynamic between agency workers and the foster parent on foster parent retention is an ongoing theme in the literature. Geiger et al. (2017) researched foster parent retention in a more recent study considering the relationship between the foster parent and agency worker. The research study was much anticipated following the work of Geiger et al. (2013), in which foster parent satisfaction was found to depend on their relationship with agency workers. The premise of the Geiger et al. (2017) study was that foster parents need support from the agency worker to continue fostering (Geiger et al., 2017). The authors employed a mixed-methods triangulation approach. The state licensed the foster parents who participated, and 1,095 participated in the study. Participants completed a 77-question survey. The team analyzed the data using descriptive analysis and linear regression. Lastly, the open-ended responses were coded. The findings in 2017 were consistent with the report in 2013; however, more attention was given to the interactions between foster parents and agency workers. The findings revealed room for improvement in the relationship between foster parents and case workers. Nearly half (n = 55%), of foster parents reported being unsatisfied with support from the case worker (Geiger et al., 2017).

Mihalo et al. (2016) attributed foster parent satisfaction to foster parent perceived support. Brown et al. (2014) argued that foster parent retention would improve if administrators would better meet the needs of agency workers. In their study, Brown et al. used concept mapping to collect, organize, represent, and interpret the responses from 68 participants. The study generated unique data to supplement information uncovered in the literature review. Brown et al. reported that resource workers need training on self-care and support to travel long distances in addition to traditional findings, such as conflict resolution. Policymakers may be able to increase foster parent retention if they integrate methods to increase the quality of the relationship between the foster parent and the agency worker. Agency workers have a widespread influence on foster parent retention. Agency administrators may be able to influence retention by improving the work experience of the agency workers. However, it is necessary to uncover other ways agency administrators can influence foster parent retention.

Impact of Placement Outcomes

Foster parent satisfaction and retention are strongly associated with placement outcomes of youth. Koh et al. (2014) found 83% of failed placements are due to youth behavior challenges. Training resources, parent management support, mental health, psychiatric health, and community outlets are other types of support for foster parents. Ahn et al. (2017) paralleled work from previous researchers listing respite services, transportation services, and medical and psychological services as necessary layers of support for foster parents. Medical support can help provide stabilization services for youth in foster homes. Pac (2017) suggested that increased financial support positively

influenced foster parent retention. Pac explored the influence of the monthly stipend on placement stability and discovered a positive correlation between foster parent stipend amounts and placement stability. A 1% increase in the stipend amount is related to a 27% decrease in disruption risk (Pac, 2017). The stipend helps foster parents provide for the essential needs of foster youth.

In addition to financial support, Daniel (2011), Day et al. (2018), and Madden et al. (2016) stressed the value and importance of respite services on foster parent retention. Madden et al. dedicated an entire study to identifying an association between foster parent retention and respite services. The authors used an exploratory cross-sectional survey approach to collect data from 197 parents. The authors collected data from foster parent support group funding from AdoptUSKids and via survey instruments explicitly developed for the project. Madden et al. reported a 90% reduction in foster parent stress when respite services were utilized, and 68% of participants reported increased stability when they used respite services. Madden et al. explained that respite services increased placement stability and retention through formal and informal respite services. Formal respite services are scheduled events, and informal respite services are unscheduled. Not only are the findings from respite services significant, but policy stakeholders should also consider financial support, clinical services, and behavior management support when exploring factors that influence foster parent retention.

With nearly 500,000 youth in foster care, it is in the best interest of policy stakeholders to explore foster parent retention. Researchers agree that retention rates depend on foster parents' perception of support. Support factors include, but are not

limited to, communication between the case worker and the foster parent, services from the case worker, financial support, clinical services for the youth, and respite services. Considering Herzberg's hygiene factors, I reviewed the literature on foster parent retention in this section. The theory helped to relate worker retention to foster parent retention data, foster parent training requirements, foster care policy, foster parent and foster youth culture, and foster parent support. The data provided insight into foster parent retention.

Motivation Factors

Herzberg categorized motivation factors as intrinsic and influential to a worker's motivation to complete tasks (Kotni & Karumuri, 2018). Examples of intrinsic elements included worker recognition, the worker's level of responsibility, career development opportunities, involvement in decision making, the worker's perception of personal value, and the worker's feeling of personal growth. The motivation concept in the two-factor theory is used in this section to help synthesize the literature to better understand foster parent continuation and discontinuation of services. The literature reflects multiple themes suggesting why foster parents continue providing services to at-risk youth. The themes are related to the foster parents' emotional satisfaction with their foster parenting role. The themes are categorized into the following subsections: altruism, self-efficacy, and connectedness.

I found an overwhelming response in the literature to understand foster parent retention related to elements of foster parent satisfaction. Blakey et al. (2012) contributed to that body of knowledge after conducting a qualitative study that included a large

population sample from 49 states in the United States. Blakey et al. used structured interviews lasting 15 minutes to gather data by telephone. The researchers transcribed and coded the interviews into a qualitative software program and used axial coding and thematic analysis to interpret the data. Blakey et al. linked satisfaction to placement stability giving attention to the foster parent's level of satisfaction. The authors concluded that foster parents who did not feel satisfied with their fostering situation were more likely to disrupt a foster child than a foster parent who was more satisfied. In response to the findings, the researchers reported trends in placement stability services such as placement matching, behavior support services, specific agency worker to foster parent assignment, and foster parent appreciation events (Blakey et al., 2012).

Blakey et al. agreed with the findings of Crum (2010), who associated placement stability with the foster parent's level of satisfaction. Child welfare researchers associated foster parent motivation with feelings of satisfaction with the fostering situation, and satisfaction was linked to successful outcomes for the youth. These authors agreed that successful outcomes for foster youth increase the foster parents' internal satisfaction level. Ahn et al. (2017) called for more empirical exploration of foster parent satisfaction.

Altruism

One of the most prevalent reoccurring themes regarding foster parent motivation is altruism. Several studies published around 2011 specifically addressed altruistic foster parent motivation. Daniel (2011) conducted a qualitative exploratory research study to examine the motivation factors of foster parents who provided service for at least 5 years. Daniel included licensed foster parents in the participant pool and gathered data via

telephone interviews. Although Daniel only interviewed eight foster parents, making it difficult to generalize the findings, the research conclusions are consistent with other studies. Both Daniel (2011) and Berrick et al. (2011) agreed that foster parents are motivated by intrinsic elements. Some of those intrinsic elements are the foster parent's identification with the foster child's situation, love for children in general, feelings of joy when children are successful, and personal satisfaction with parenting at-risk youth (see Berrick et al., 2011; Daniel, 2011).

Ahn et al. (2017) and Geiger et al. (2013) expounded on the notion that foster parents are motivated by altruistic factors. Ahn et al. believed that foster parents are motivated by a desire to impact youth positively. Geiger et al. used a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design to gather research on foster parent retention. Because their study is more significant than that of Ahn et al. (2017), the findings of Geiger et al. may be more generalizable. Geiger et al. developed an online survey and provided the survey to 3,922 licensed foster homes and received 649 replies. The authors reported three primary categories of intrinsic motivations in the study: rewards, responsibility, and self-fulfillment. Geiger et al. concluded that it is reasonable to attribute foster parent retention to intrinsic rewards such as positive youth interaction, helping the youth grow and be successful, and helping them reunite with their parents (p. 1361). In summary, foster parents provide services to help youth achieve life goals and personal development, and they report higher satisfaction when they make a positive change because it triggers happiness and self-fulfillment as an intrinsic reward.

Self-Efficacy

Foster parents' self-efficacy often appeared in the literature. Researchers agree that self-efficacy influences foster parent satisfaction and retention. Whenan et al. (2009) is the earliest piece of literature reviewed in this section, and the themes from their study are carried forward throughout other studies. After interviewing 582 foster parents, Whenan et al. identified a strong relationship between foster parent self-efficacy and foster parent satisfaction. Foster parent satisfaction was weighed against the emotional stress of managing youth behaviors to explore satisfaction. Cooley and Petren (2011) helped interpret the connection between foster parent self-efficacy and foster parent satisfaction in a practical sense for social workers. They concluded that self-efficacy positively influences satisfaction (Cooley & Petren, 2011). Cooley and Petren (2011) recommended that foster parent training include a strategy that develops a foster parent's self-efficacy by integrating foster parent experiences into the training discussion.

Geiger et al. (2013) associated foster parent retention with self-efficacy and concluded that much of the success of the youth and the foster parent is connected to self-efficacy. Mihalo et al. (2016) developed the ideas of Geiger et al. and suggested that agency workers influence foster parent retention by developing foster parent self-efficacy. Specifically, Ahn et al. (2017) concluded that increasing the quality of foster parent training with practical parenting skills is a meaningful way to influence foster parent self-efficacy. More recently, McKeough et al. (2017) summarized the abovementioned ideas and concluded that foster parents with more practical skills also have higher self-efficacy. Foster parent retention relies on the foster parent's perception

of self-efficacy, and agency workers must include self-efficacy elements when training

foster parents. Neglecting to address self-efficacy in foster parent training courses may

not improve foster parent satisfaction and retention. I did not find any literature to

discredit the correlation between foster parent retention and self-efficacy.

The literature divulged a positive correlation between concepts of foster parent

connectedness and retention. I found that emotional connectedness between the foster

parent and their family members, case workers, and foster youth indicates foster parent

retention. Feelings of connectedness help foster parents cope with stress. Whenan et al.

(2009) concluded that placements are likely to fail when a foster parent's emotional stress

increases. Madden et al. (2016) explored the influence of respite services on emotional

stress. In an exploratory cross-sectional study, Madden et al. interviewed 197 foster

parents to specifically gather data on the use and influence of formal and informal respite

services. The survey tool was extensive, including 42 variables. The authors identified

patterns in the data by using descriptive and exploratory analyses and concluded that 90%

of foster parents' responses implied that respite services reduced emotional stress.

Respite services give the foster parent time away from the foster youth's

challenging behaviors to rest. While time away is direct support, respite services allow

time for foster parents to have contact with loved ones and feel connected. Koh et al.

(2014) created awareness of the importance of "feelings of connection between the foster

family and the foster parent's marital relationship" (p. 44). The findings of Koh et al. are

consistent with the findings of Geiger et al. (2013): foster parent emotional

connectedness directly influences foster parent retention. Both Koh et al. and Geiger et al.

agreed that foster parents are more capable of managing emotional stress when they express healthy feelings of connectedness with family members, friends, professionals, and the foster youth. Respite services may increase foster parents' satisfaction because it allows them time to develop relationships with their spouse, family members, and community.

Connectedness

Relating the emotional connection between a foster parent and the case worker to retention, support, and satisfaction is a reoccurring theme in the literature. Researchers agree that emotional support from the case worker to the foster parent influences retention (see Chambers et al., 2017; Daniel, 2011; Geiger et al., 2017). A healthy emotional connection to the case worker helps the foster parent manage stress by feeling validated, connected to the team, and understood. Geiger et al. (2017) provided a conclusive explanation that foster parents who feel connected to their case worker are more likely to continue to provide services. Chambers et al. (2017) challenged case workers to influence retention by manipulating their relationship with the foster parent by providing emotional support. Although defining emotional support is complicated, Geiger et al. (2013) explained that emotional support is the physical availability of the case worker, the establishment of practical support, positive words of encouragement, and any healthy expression of care from the case worker to the foster parent. The case worker's relationship with the foster parent indicates foster parent retention.

Foster parents manage emotional stress through connections with family, friends, and professionals. Emotional connections within the foster family help the foster parent

manage stress. Respite services create an opportunity for the foster parent to develop feelings of connectedness within the family. Feeling connected to the child's team helps the foster parent to feel listened to and valued. Lastly, feeling connected to the case worker helps the foster parent to feel validated. Emotional connectedness has a strong correlation with foster parent retention.

Policy Feedback Theory and Feedback Effects

The goal of PFT is to determine the trajectory of a policy based on the economic benefits to the government and social benefits to citizens. The development of policy and the influence of a policy can be explained by studying power groups. Power groups are vested individuals affected by policy who have the influence to cause policy changes (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). The research goal of my dissertation was to explain foster parent retention from the perspective of foster parents. Therefore, this section's power group of interest includes foster parents who parent at-risk youth.

Feedback effects can be positive or negative. Positive policy feedback encourages the current trajectory of a policy, while negative policy feedback indicates that policy changes are likely. I filtered the above information from the articles reviewed in this study through the feedback effects lens and identified both positive and negative policy feedback effects.

In the literature, I found the following elements that I classify as positive policy feedback effects: (a) training quality, (b) relevant policy, (c) culturally informed practice, and (d) and administrative/financial support. Tennessee experienced increased foster care services by implementing the list into its training program. The training program in

Tennessee was beneficial to foster parents because it led to a decrease in congregate care services in Tennessee. Decreasing the number of congregate care placements may also benefit Tennessee economically. As noted by Alpert and Meezan (2012), Tennessee decreased the utilization of congregate care services by increasing the quality of its foster parent training program. Tennessee is also an excellent example of how relevant policy can provide economic benefits to the government and positive change to citizens. Alpert and Meezan cited policy changes from the Brian A. v. Haslam settlement. The settlement demanded policy changes in Tennessee to increase the number of youth placed in a family setting and decrease the utilization of congregate care and shelter-style placements.

As I reported in this chapter, Tennessee made relevant policy changes and experienced an increase in placements in a family-based setting. Brown et al. (2009) provided an example of the economic benefits of policy change. The authors concluded that foster care placements were more stable when the youth's culture overlapped with the foster family. I also found examples of how financial gains influenced foster parent retention. Ahn et al. (2017) found that a 1% increase in the monthly stipend resulted in a 27% decrease in disruption risk. To summarize this portion of the literature, foster parent education, culturally informed placements, relevant policy, and financial support play an essential role in foster parent retention. Policymakers should continue developing policies that support the items above to increase foster parent retention.

Policy analysis considers how a policy is effective, efficient, and equitable for stakeholders (Seavey et al., 2014). In the literature review, I noted trends among foster

care policy stakeholders that indicated adverse feedback effects for foster care policy.

The negative trends are related to the current foster care policy's effectiveness,

efficiency, and equality. The review is an indicator that foster care policy reform is

indispensable. First, Brown et al. (2009) explored foster care placement factors using

concept mapping. The authors determined that more research is needed in the foster care

field to better understand how placement influences retention. Policy changes may be

needed to produce an increase in foster care research. Ahn et al. (2017) cited poor

communication between foster parents and agencies or agency workers as an influencer

on foster parent retention. Policy stakeholders must consider changes that develop

healthier communication patterns between foster care workers and foster parents. For

example, increased training hours for foster care workers regarding communication skills

coupled with lower caseloads for foster care workers may help improve communication

measures. A poor reflection on general case worker services is another example of a

negative feedback effect (Oke et al., 2011). Lastly, I found in the literature that foster

parents discontinue services due to feeling disconnected (Cooley et al., 2015). Feldman et

al. (2016) called for an increase in research efforts to explain foster parent retention in

light of some of the concerns above. Policy stakeholders need more information to

understand foster parent retention to develop foster care policy.

Policies are inspired by the stakeholder's culture, resources, personalities, and

motivations (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). Developing a child welfare policy should include

provisions to increase the quality of the relationship between the case worker and the

foster parent. Improving communication, reliability, and knowledge of the case worker

may be strategic in increasing the relationship quality between the foster parent and the case worker. While some argue that foster parents may be financially motivated, the research indicated that foster parents have altruistic motives, too. Foster care policy should be influenced in a way that complements foster parent altruism and self-efficacy. Lastly, foster care policy may need more provisions to manage the health of the foster parent and foster parent family by instituting measures for foster parent connectedness. Connectedness is holistic; the foster parent must feel connected to their spouse, biological children, foster children, agency worker, and community.

In this section, I identified policy effects from the foster parent power groups as presented in the literature review. I discussed both positive and negative policy effects. Effective policy is balanced by being economical for governments and beneficial for constituents. Not all foster care policy meets this description. The policy feedback identified in the literature justified the need for more research to explain foster parent retention. Some trends, such as lack of research, poor communication, and increased need for foster parent self-efficacy, call for a divergent policy on the policyscape and increase foster parent retention.

Summary and Conclusions

Foster parent policy has shifted by reform at both the federal and state level many times. From time to time, foster care policy is shaped by litigation. Trends in the policyscape can be identified and used to reform foster care policy without litigation by using the theoretical framework in this dissertation. No researchers have examined foster parent retention in Tennessee through a PFT and two-factor theory lens. Youth in foster

care are among the most vulnerable population in the United States. Child welfare

workers can increase the quality of health for children and adolescents in foster care. In

this study, the literature review revealed that foster parent retention is contingent on

intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction factors. In reviewing the literature, I was able to

identify the concepts for use in the current study. First, external factors related to training,

policy, and collaboration may influence foster parent retention. Second, foster parent

retention may be contingent on internal factors such as altruism, self-efficacy, and

feelings of connectedness. Lastly, foster parent retention may be connected to policy

feedback. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology for the current study. I explain how I

generated data in Tennessee to inform the foster care policy.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to collect data to explain the retention of foster parents who parent at-risk youth in Tennessee. Like other states, Tennessee has too few foster homes, and the FFSFA legislation requires states to increase the number of foster homes to support at-risk youth. Tennessee can increase the number of foster homes by increasing the retention rate of foster parents. Understanding retention factors from the perspectives of foster parents is essential to increasing the retention of foster parents in Tennessee. I collected data using a generic qualitative inquiry research approach to understand foster parent retention. In this chapter, I explore the research methodology under the following headings: (a) research design and rationale, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) methodology, (d) trustworthiness, and (e) summary.

Research Design and Rationale

I utilized a qualitative design for this study based on the research problem and purpose. Rudestam and Newton (2015) identified the importance of concisely presenting the research design, so the reader understands the link between the research problem, the research method, and the results. I identified the following research problem: Tennessee does not have enough foster homes for at-risk youth to comply with FFSPA. Therefore, my research goal was to explore foster parent retention from the perspectives of foster parents in Tennessee to generate data for policy stakeholders to increase foster parent retention in Tennessee.

To conduct the study, I used a generic qualitative inquiry. According to Patton (2015), generic qualitative inquiry is a research rationale that allows a researcher to explore human experiences apart from a specific theoretical framework. This flexibility allows a researcher to apply qualitative techniques to research questions without limitation. Generic qualitative inquiry is best used when other qualitative frameworks do not adequately satisfy the research goals (Percy et al., 2015). Percy et al. (2015) explained that generic qualitative inquiry is a good choice when a researcher seeks to collect data regarding a person's reflections on their environment externally rather than their person internally. I explored the retention of foster parents to explain the collective retention experience of those foster parents externally to policy stakeholders in Tennessee. Therefore, generic qualitative inquiry was a good choice for my research design because I was seeking to generate data on foster parents' collective perceptions of retention.

Before collecting data, I requested approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I collected data using the following sources: (a) a researcher-developed interview guide, (b) field notes, and (c) literature on Tennessee policy regarding foster parent retention. I employed qualitative data analysis software to help analyze the data. I analyzed the data using thematic analysis. After analyzing the data, I synthesized and translated the data into practical recommendations for policymakers.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I am personally and professionally connected to the foster care system in Tennessee. First, as a child, I grew up as an underprivileged and at-risk youth. I suffered many disruptions as a child until I was taken in by my grandmother at the age of 12. Second, I adopted two adolescents with complex needs who were in the foster care system in Tennessee. Finally, I worked in the foster care system in Tennessee for 10 years. My tenure as a foster care agency worker included 2 years as a case manager, 2 years as a team leader supervising case managers, 2 years in an entry-level administrative position where I coordinated program services in a group home setting, and 3 years as an agency director providing administration services for a foster care group home program.

I used data triangulation methods to manage researcher bias through researcher reflexivity measures (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The process helped me to manage my professional assumptions about foster parent retention factors in the collected data. In this research project, I served as the instrument. The foster parents may be associated with the same agency where I worked; however, I did not supervise the foster parent participants. To manage ethical concerns, I did not collect data from any team member in my department or under my supervision. Prior to recruiting participants, I gained approval from IRB and the participating agency. After the study is completed, I will make the abstract available to all participants.

Methodology

In the study, I employed a qualitative research design using data triangulation methods to generate information to answer the research questions. The research

methodology aligns with the research questions and objectives to ensure the research design is practical for the researcher and comprehendible to the reader (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). In the following sections, I explain the link between the research design and the research problem.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Creswell (2009) described purposive sampling as a technique where a researcher recruits specific people to help make sense of a problem. I used purposive sampling because I targeted a specific group of foster parents with specific experience fostering at-risk youth. I recruited foster parents who worked with at-risk for at least 2 years. I recruited participants until I reached data saturation, which occurred after analyzing 10 participants' in-depth interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Before confirming participants' approval for the study, participants completed a prescreening questionnaire to confirm they met the participation criteria. Participants were foster parents in Tennessee with 2 years or more of foster experience and little to no disruptions. Participants were associated with nonprofit foster care agencies or government agencies in Tennessee. Before participating, the participants had to have an endorsement from their affiliated agency or a foster parent. The endorsement helped to eliminate foster parents who are not successful at parenting at-risk youth. For example, I did not want to collect data from foster parents who have experienced retention with a high rate of youth disruptions.

I recruited partnership agencies and foster parent participants for this study. First, I attempted to recruit three agencies. After the agencies were identified, I sent a letter of

cooperation approved by Walden University to the agencies. In the letter of cooperation, I explained the purpose of the study. I also explained that foster parents must have the endorsement of their affiliated agency to participate. I explained the participant criteria carefully in the letter and defined the term *at-risk youth*. I included instructions for the agency to follow up with the foster parent or to permit me to follow up with the foster parent to confirm their participation. I asked for the agency to provide the foster parent with a copy of a letter describing my study (see Appendix B). Lastly, I informed the agency that I would make a copy of my dissertation available to them electronically. After the agency confirmed cooperation, I obtained consent on a letter of cooperation. If an agency declined to participate, I politely responded, thanking them for their consideration.

Lastly, I recruited foster parent participants. Participation was voluntary, and participants were not compensated. I recruited participants from the agency where I worked because I could not recruit enough participants from the other agencies. I did not supervise foster parents directly. I supervised the residential program, case management services, and the in-house school. I supervised residential employees. IRB and the executive director at the participating agency approved the recruitment plan. I recruited cooperation in writing from the foster care director at the participating agency and asked the director to share my recruitment information to foster parent participants (see Appendix E). After an agency endorsed foster parents, I contacted the foster parents by phone. On the first call, I confirmed that the foster parent received the letter describing my study. I conducted the prescreening questionnaire on the initial call to confirm the

foster parent's eligibility (see Appendix D). If the foster parent remained eligible, I scheduled a formal, in-depth semistructured interview to be completed either in person, by phone, or through video conferencing. All participants proved eligible. After a foster parent's participation had been confirmed, I confirmed their participation and shared their interview date. I sent a copy of the questions that would be asked during the interview. Lastly, I included a copy of informed consent form (see Appendix C).

Instrumentation

Qualitative data can be validated using triangulation methods when multiple data sources are utilized (Patton, 2015). I collected data from three sources and used data triangulation methods. I collected data from in-depth semistructured interviews, state policy literature related to foster parent retention, and field notes. After transcribing interviews with participants, I reviewed the transcripts against my field notes.

Before conducting interviews, I explained informed consent and fully disclosed the intent to use the participants' experiences as data for my dissertation (see Appendix F). I completed the interviews by phone, in person, or via video conferencing. In-person interviews were completed in a public space, such as a local library. The interviews were recorded with an audio recording device. I obtained informed consent prior to conducting the interview and recording participants. I emailed participants a copy of the informed consent document with instructions on how to provide consent. This allowed the participant the opportunity to review the informed consent in private. I developed the informed consent document (see Appendix F) using the information provided by Walden University. I anticipated that the interviews would last up to 90 minutes. I collected all

the data from each participant in one interview session. After the interview, I used Temi transcription software. I did not add to or take away from the interview. After the interview was transcribed, I compared the transcript with my field notes.

I interviewed participants using a researcher-developed interview protocol. Patton (2015) stated that an interview guide may help a researcher provide structure to the interview process. My academic experience, professional experience, and literature review informed the interview guide. I designed the interview protocol so that the questions would trigger responses about the foster parent's role, motivation, and satisfaction as a foster parent. The interview protocol consisted of a mix of 15 closed and open-ended questions. The protocol included an opening, the body, and closing remarks. The opening paragraph consisted of a warm greeting, an introduction to my academic work at Walden University, a description of my career goal, and the purpose of my research. I included a description of what the participants should expect during the interview process. I described the style of the interview as semistructured. I confirmed that I received the informed consent document in the second paragraph. I explained that I would audio record the interview with their permission. Then, I explained that some laws required me to report types of abuse and imminent threats to myself and my community.

The body of the interview protocol included 15 questions. The first question prompted me to ask the interviewee to put their story in context by explaining the reason and the decision they made to become a foster parent. This first question established a baseline to code the foster parent's motivation for foster parenting. The most predictable question prompted the foster parent to explain what was going well with their fostering

experience. Some questions were more leading because of the extensive literature review. For example, the eighth question prompted the foster parent to describe their experience managing their relationship with at-risk youth. Also, Question 11 requested the participant to describe the influence of caseworkers on their foster parenting role. I ended the interview with a simple open-ended inquiry giving the foster parent a final opportunity to add anything else.

Finally, in the closing remarks, I respectfully applauded their story and showed gratitude for their participation. I requested permission to contact the participant if I had any additional questions. After transcribing the interview, I informed the foster parent that I would be in contact with them to provide the abstract upon completion of the study.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) justified using field notes as a valid data source when triangulating data because it allows the researcher to record the real-time experiences of the participants and the researcher. While there are parameters for collected field notes, the practice is also flexible. I used field notes to record my experiences and observations while collecting data. I recorded notes in an electronic journal. After collecting the notes, I transcribed the notes and coded the notes using the data analysis strategy described in the following section. I used the following protocol for entering a field note. First, I summarized the interview by describing the content, the emotion of the interviewee, and my emotion as the interviewer. I explained the most surprising finding. I reflected on the information that was surprisingly different from the literature review and commented on data that were most consistent with the literature review. Next, I interpreted the interview for policy purposes and listed suggestions for public policy that may be relevant to police

stakeholders in Tennessee. In the final segment of the filed note, I addressed anything significant that came to mind and made a list of follow-up questions and action steps.

The final source of data I used to triangulate was archival data. More specifically, I used official documents of the Department of Children's Services in Tennessee. Ravitch and Carl (2016) included archival data as a data source to be used in triangulation methods and also stated that archival data are effective for providing a historical and contextual perspective on the research topic. I reviewed the Foster Parent Handbook for Tennessee Foster Parents and the Foster Family Recruitment and Retention Policy, also referred to as Policy 16.7. The Foster Parent Handbook for Tennessee foster parents includes an eight-point commitment from the state to retain foster parents, including the following: relief services, mentor services, foster parent appreciation effort, support from employees, inclusion in the child's treatment, network support from other foster parents, training, and inclusion of the foster parent in the child's team meetings. The policy strategy fits categorically into the following headings: training, administrative support, communication support, emotional support, and financial support.

The policy reads that Tennessee will use foster parents to help recruit other foster parents and foster parents will receive annual recognition and on-time stipend payments, will have an open door with administrators, and will receive training. All items referenced in the eight-point statements were included in the literature review. I was surprised that the literature in Tennessee did not have a more specific strategy for surveying their foster parent population to collect retention data. I was also surprised that there was no quality improvement strategy for increasing the overall quality of the foster

parent experience in Tennessee. The literature did not adequately address foster parent

retention issues, cultural differences between the foster parent and the foster youth, the

professional dynamic between the foster parent and the case worker, behavioral support

for the foster parent, or the need for the foster parent to have a sense of connection to

their community. However, previous researchers have listed categorical needs of foster

parents that are believed to influence retention, such as receiving the stipend payment on

time and having an open-door policy with the administration.

Data Analysis Plan

During the data analysis process, the researcher interprets the data and explains

the social implication. Rubin and Rubin (2012) cautioned the researcher to conduct

analysis rigorously by revisiting data frequently to interpret the information accurately.

Findings should constantly be tested against the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) described

thematic analysis as a flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data. Because my study

was a generic qualitative study, I used thematic analysis to generate genuine findings

from the data. I did not want to create conclusions influenced by a pre-existing theory or

framework. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that inductive analysis is "data-driven," and

researchers do not have to associate the data with a pre-existing thematic category. This

process allowed for unique themes to generate from the collected data, making the

findings more specific. The purpose of this study was to inform public policy

stakeholders in Tennessee by explaining the retention of foster parents who parent at-risk

youth. The following research questions were addressed: how do foster parents who

parent at-risk youth experience retention, and how can foster parent experiences shape Tennessee policy to promote foster parent retention more effectively?

I completed the following steps to conduct an inductive analysis. Percy et al. (2015) described inductive analysis as a process including the following steps: (a) identify helpful information related to the research questions on the transcript, (b) complete first level coding by assigning theme or descriptive words, (c) sort the codes into clusters and identify patterns, (d) associate the patterns into themes, (e) analyze the data together, and (f) develop a collective synthesis of the information (p. 81). This process is also referred to by Patton (2015) as coding, dating, theming data, and comparing data using cross-sectional analysis. First, I transcribed the recorded data. Then, I reviewed the written information and removed information not essential to my research questions. Third, I coded the data by identifying specific words and phrases that stuck out to me from the written data. I then sorted the codes into clusters. Next, I compared those clusters to identify patterns in the data. I categorized the information and described each theme thoroughly in narrative form. Then, I analyzed the data beginning with smaller parts and moving to the whole narrative in conjunction with the research questions. Lastly, I synthesized the data into an extensive narrative providing a general description of the retention of foster parents. I synthesized data by associating and contrasting the themes and descriptions against the two-factor theory, PFT, and the findings in the literature review.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The influence of a research study is limited to the researcher's integrity. My plan for trustworthiness is outlined in this section. I responded to issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and used rigorous analysis techniques. Patton (2015) suggested that researchers conduct a thorough analysis to achieve credibility. Rigorous analyses include reorganizing the data for other possible outcomes as well as developing and disproving other possible explanations. I explored alternative effects by reorganizing and restructuring data. To address issues with transferability, Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested researchers provide a "thick description" of the context and data. I provided detailed descriptions of the research context and the findings so that other professionals may determine the applicability of the study. I achieved dependability by triangulating the data, sequencing the data, and rationalizing the data selection methods as recommended by Ravitch and Carl. I collected data from field notes, semi-structured interviews, and state policy documents. Finally, I obtained confirmability by exploring researcher reflexivity. Ravitch and Carl defined researcher reflexivity as the researcher exploring researcher bias; thus, I explored researcher bias. My research is trustworthy because I included empirical practices supporting credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

I had three primary ethical concerns when conducting research for this project. I did not begin collecting research until I received IRB approval (05-05-21-0540819). First, before collecting data, I disclosed my role, responsibilities, and plan to my

employer. Some participants may come from other departments in the agency where I was employed, but none came from the department I supervised. I served as the residential director, while participants were supervised by the foster care director. Second, people become vulnerable when sharing their stories and need to feel safe working with a researcher. I conducted myself as a professional researcher and managed data securely and confidentially. I ensured participants that I followed Walden's list of ethical data collection and management procedures. Lastly, because the participants work with at-risk youth, I asked participants to exclude responses that may identify youth or violate a youth's privacy. I confirmed that I had obtained informed consent from all participants. I managed data by following secure protocols such as transporting written data in locked containers and password-protecting digital data. All data, including written data, were secured behind lock and key. Finally, participants were free to decide if they wanted to participate in the study. If participants withdrew from the study early, I provided them with the same respect and privacy as all other participants. Participants did not receive any compensation for their participation. While this list of ethical concerns is intended to be comprehensive, it may not be all-inclusive.

Summary

I conducted a generic qualitative inquiry to understand the retention of foster parents who parent at-risk youth in Tennessee. In Chapter 3, I discussed how I selected and recruited participants and described the instruments that I used to collect data. I described my data analysis plan, discussed issues of trustworthiness, and explained the ethical procedures that I followed throughout this research study. I used the qualitative

research design to gain a better understand of foster parent retention in Tennessee with

the approval of Walden University's IRB.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this qualitative study, I aimed to explain the retention of foster parents who parent at-risk youth in Tennessee. Tennessee needs more foster homes for at-risk adolescents to prevent youth from being homeless. Tennessee has over 8,000 foster youth in care and too few foster homes for those youth. In this study, I collected data to help explain foster parent retention. In this research, I explored two research questions:

Research Question 1: How do foster parents who parent at-risk youth experience retention?

Research Question 2: How can foster parent experiences shape Tennessee policy to promote foster parent retention more effectively?

Data were collected in 10 semistructured interviews with foster parents. The data were analyzed using inductive analysis. The findings from this study reveal Tennessee foster parents' retention experiences. The results also provide relevant data for policymakers in Tennessee to consider when developing foster care policy. In Chapter 4, I explain the setting of the study and the demographic data of the participants, discuss the data collection experience, describe the process for data analysis, discuss issues of trustworthiness, and provide the results of the study.

Setting

While conducting this study, I served as a senior administrator at a foster care agency in Tennessee. I did not recruit any foster parent participants who actively fostered within the agency where I worked or who worked directly under my supervision. The

agency where I worked exposed me to challenges in foster parent retention across the state of Tennessee. The agency experiences foster parent turnover, placement disruptions, employee turnover, and a shortage of foster homes willing to parent at-risk youth. The shortcomings led me to explore foster parent retention with an open mind and with the goal of increasing retention of qualified foster parents. I interviewed parents who have provided foster parent services for 2 years or more. Researcher reflexivity generated an opportunity to create organic data from the analysis. The researcher reflexivity practice I employed was data triangulation methods, including memos.

The foster parents who agreed to participate in the study were all influenced by their own foster parenting experiences. Some of the foster parents shared a positive foster parenting experience, whereas others shared a negative experience. The data suggest that foster parents participated to improve the overall experience for foster parents. The interview data were rich and may continually shape foster care policy to improve the experiences of foster parents and children.

I began this study in 2018 and completed data collection in 2021. The biggest surprise to me was the time it took to complete the data collection. During the data collection process, I experienced mandatory overtime at my place of employment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I experienced the death of close friends, the death of coworkers, and the death of family members. Some of the losses I experienced was due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During data collection, my wife gave birth to our fourth, fifth, and sixth children. I also experienced a medical emergency and had to take medical leave. All these factors are relevant to the long duration of data collection.

Demographics

The participants in the study were foster parents or had foster parenting experience with adolescents in Tennessee. In adherence with the criteria set in Chapter 1, the participants had at least 2 years of experience working with at-risk youth. Personal demographic information such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity were not collected for this study because they were irrelevant to the research questions. However, all participants were older than 21 because Tennessee does not license foster parents under 21 unless the foster parent is opening their home for a kinship placement. There were no kinship foster parents interviewed for this study. All the participating foster parents were married; however, not all the spouses chose to participate in the study. All the participants were employed full-time or retired. Socioeconomic information was not collected for this study because it was irrelevant to the research questions. However, the state of Tennessee requires foster parents to provide documentation showing they are financially independent and capable of caring for the needs of the foster youth without a foster care stipend. The personal names of the participants were not collected for the study. The interviews and the responses were coded without using personal identifying information. Data collection began after IRB approval. After obtaining IRB approval, I recruited a foster care agency in East Tennessee, requesting permission to conduct research within their organization. The agency's senior administration team granted written permission for me to conduct research within their organization. I contacted the foster parents from the agency to request their participation.

A total of 10 foster parents participated in the study, although 42 foster parents were invited to participate. Each foster parent participated in a semistructured interview conducted through Zoom video conferencing software. The interview protocol was followed. The shortest interview was 12 minutes in length, while the longest interview was 93 minutes. All 15 questions from the interview protocol were asked to each participant. Even though the participants were allowed to skip questions if the questions triggered emotional stress, all 10 responded to all 15 questions. All participants completed the interview in one session. There were no in-person interviews conducted in this study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were completed via Zoom, and Zoom was also used to audio record the interviews. After the audio recording was generated from the video conference, I uploaded the audio file into Temi where the file was transcribed. After the transcript was generated, I edited the transcript to reduce errors from the recording. I removed information that was not specific to my research questions and the interview protocol. After editing, I uploaded the transcripts into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program.

I did not ask for specific background information from participants. I narrowed the questions to focus on issues influencing the foster parents' decision to continue providing services. The foster parents provided service for a median of 13.6 years. Collectively, the participants reported a total of 136 years of fostering experience. One of the foster parents indicated that they, too, were a foster child when they were a teenager. Three foster parents indicated that they were considered at-risk youth growing up. Four

of the foster parents indicated that they adopted youth from foster care. All the foster

parents were actively involved in the lives of at-risk youth.

Table 1

Foster Parent Years of Service

Foster parent	Years of service
FP1	15
FP2	15
FP3	8
FP4	8
FP5	3
FP6	12
FP7	12
FP8	19
FP9	22
FP10	22

Data Collection

I collected data from archival resources, semistructured interviews, and notes

recorded as memos for this qualitative study. Archival data were collected for 12 weeks

in 2019. I reviewed archival data from foster care policy in Tennessee that influenced

foster parent retention. To collect archival data, I consulted professionals in the field who

recommended documentation specific to my study. I also searched public databases using

keywords such as *retention* and *foster parent*. Interview data were collected for 12 weeks

in 2021. I searched the state of Tennessee's government website for archival information

and located a foster care manual, a foster parent handbook, and a foster parent bill of

rights with information connected to foster parent retention.

Interviewees were foster parents with experience fostering at-risk adolescents. The interview questions focused on the foster experience related to foster parent retention. Participants were allowed to take as much time as needed, request breaks, and skip questions if the questions generated stress. Foster parents were given the option of participating in person or through video conferencing. Field notes were collected during the same period as the interviews were collected. I was the only contributor to the field note memos. The field note memos were completed the same day as the interview. The field notes summarized my emotions, the participant's emotions, and the interview's content. Further, in my field notes, I listed information consistent with the literature review, described information that was different from the literature review, and connected the interview to policy issues in Tennessee. The field notes were recorded in NVivo.

The interview protocol was initially designed for in-person meetings. However, with the threat of COVID-19 in my local community, the safe and responsible approach was to collect data through video conferencing, which was different from the original research plan. I used Zoom as the platform and experienced an intimate interview experience through video conferencing. There was a large range in the time it took to complete the interviews. Some responses were brief, and others were detailed. However, my impression of the 10 interviews was that the participants were sincere with their responses and genuinely cared about improving the foster care experience for children and foster parents. When I invited foster parent participants, I anticipated a better response from the foster care community. However, the 10 foster parents who agreed to

participate provided rich data. I did not deviate from the data collection process approved by the IRB. I obtained permission to use video conferencing for the data collection phase.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the audio recording using Temi, I uploaded the transcripts into NVivo, where I completed an inductive thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006). NVivo allowed me to organize, sort, and code the data using thematic analysis. I reviewed the data three times. I did not review the data with preconceived codes in mind. I allowed the data to generate codes while I explored the transcripts. NVivo allowed me to code the data using highlights and drop and drag features to create links between the written data and codes. The program was flexible and allowed me to create codes as needed. The process of creating codes was user-friendly and organized. In a seamless process, I highlighted the data and ascribed a code to the data. The codes and the data were available for viewing on a split screen. If a new code emerged, I could generate the new code in the list of existing codes in a two-step process. After I generated the initial codes, I began grouping codes. I repeated this process twice. Through the initial analysis, I produced two levels of coding. After the initial codes were generated, I grouped those codes into larger sections, which allowed me to create larger groupings and categorize primary themes.

During second-level coding, I did not identify new code and found the initial codes sufficient for the data. I identified seven themes. The transcript analysis was predictable to the analysis of the interviews. However, the document allowed for deeper analysis and ability to link themes and codes within the data. For example, *support* was a

broad theme linked to emotional support, social support, financial support, professional support, and spiritual support. The transcript analysis allowed for a deeper analysis to identify larger themes to dissect support into resources, relationships, and training as an example.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was a priority throughout the study. I followed the IRB-approved research process closely without deviation. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were upheld to sustain trustworthiness. I followed closely Patton's (2015) description of rigorous analysis to achieve credibility. I reorganized the data and looked for additional possible outcomes and used data analysis software to support a thorough analysis. I used field notes, data transcripts, and audio recordings to identify themes specific to the data and apart from my own bias. I was able to identify any specific bias by journaling specific thoughts or emotions that emerged from my experience during the interview process. I completed interviews until data saturation was achieved. Transferability is critical to data interpretation and recommendations for social change. To provide researchers with information to understand the data in context, I provided a rich description of the research context and data. I made intentional effort to preserve the voice of the foster parents when transcribing data. To improve foster parent retention, it is critical for research to continue in Tennessee. Dependability was achieved through data triangulation by using filed notes, archival data, and semistructured interviews. Lastly, I provided transparent reflection on my specific connection to the data and research topic. I explored any personal bias recognized during the data collection and analysis process.

After identifying personal bias, I analyzed the themes against the data to confirm the themes' association with the data.

Results

In this qualitative study, I aimed to collect data to explain the retention of foster parents in Tennessee and to help shape foster care policy in Tennessee. The participants provided foster parent services in Tennessee. The participants answered the interview questions using their experiences as foster parents. I explored the data generated from those experiences to explain foster parent retention. Two research questions guided my exploration regarding how foster parents who parent at-risk youth experience retention and how foster parents' experiences can shape Tennessee policy to promote foster parent retention more effectively. I created an interview guide consisting of 15 questions to support the interviews and to help explain how foster parents experience retention. I used a semistructured interview technique to conduct all interviews. After analyzing the data, I identified seven themes. In the following section, I provide a detailed analysis of the themes and subthemes for each research question.

Research Question One

The first research question asked, How do foster parents who parent at-risk youth experience retention? I asked the participants what was going well, the challenges of making placements work, the emotions experienced by foster parents, and the reasons foster parents chose to work with at-risk youth in foster care. A total of five themes emerged: (a) showing compassion, (b) relevant training and resources, (c) employed

relevant parenting tips that create success, (d) were emotionally invested, and (e) had a meaningful foster parent to foster child relationship.

Theme 1: Showing Compassion

Foster parents described their role as eclectic because they provide the basic care for the foster child, mentor the foster child, and coordinate many of the professional services for the foster child. Many foster parents explained that the broad range of responsibilities overlaid with stress from their fostering situation may create excessive emotional stress. While emotional stress can discourage foster parents from providing foster parenting services, foster parents who participated in this study stated that they were motivated to continue providing services even when experiencing excessive emotional stress. Foster parents discussed that their motivation is inspired by the unfortunate life situations of foster youth and the opportunity for the foster youth to change. Foster parents described their motivation as having compassion for the foster youth, their living arrangements, and their needs.

When exploring the foster parent interview transcripts, I found that foster parents listed a broad range of needs among foster youth placements. Many of the needs were described as exceeding the normal responsibilities of a child. Some of the foster parents described extreme behavioral problems, excessive medical needs, excessive professional appointments, and excessive demands on the foster parent's schedule. The foster youth's needs were sometimes described as emotionally disruptive to the foster home and the foster parent. Foster parent compassion helped to explain foster parent retention in these situations. Foster parents were motivated by having compassion for youth who were

homeless, in need of a stable home, in need of basic care, in need of hope, in need of

shelter, in need of love, in need of a positive role model, and in need of a positive

connection with an adult who believes in them. Foster parents also described the foster

child's context as being homeless, experiencing traumatic events, without access to

healthcare, exposed to illegal acts, at risk of using drugs, and being a teen parent. Foster

parents extend themselves to help foster youth because they believe their support can be

life changing. When asked why foster parents serve in the foster parenting role and work

with foster youth, foster parents responded by saying that foster children need help. Many

foster parents described their foster parenting role as a selfless act out of necessity. The

following are samples from foster parent interviews.

FP3 said, "I think, my biggest thing was that I thought that I could make a

difference and an impact on kids' lives who hadn't had anything, because I didn't come

from a broken home." FP5 stated the following:

> Well, my husband had met two boys he was working with and they could not
>
> return to their biological home. So we, uh, considered bringing them into our
>
> home. Uh, we had always considered doing foster care or adoption in the future,
>
> but we hadn't talked about it at that moment. However, once we met those boys,
>
> we decided we wanted to give them a forever home.

FPP10 said, "There's so many kids out there that need homes, even if it's temporary. Um,

and we've got a lot of love to give, so let's do foster care." FPP5 responded:

I know that if we wouldn't have given them a home, they would not be, um, as

successful as they are, especially our youngest one who has, you know, grown by

leaps and bounds and he is stable and he is grown now and he's doing great.

FP5 said:

We also had a lot of behavioral challenges to overcome, especially with our oldest

that we fostered. Um, but really for both of them, they each had their own

challenges. So there was a lot of emotions involved in that. And I had to learn to

set my emotions aside and consider what was best for them over what I was

feeling.

FP8 said, "Trying to change disarray in a child's life, Trying to give a child a hope." FP3

stated, "Success stories of the kids who left on a positive note and actually did something

and made something of themselves when they got out of the system to see that we

actually had a positive impact on their lives."

Foster parent compassion cannot be described as a one-time phenomenon. Foster

parents explained compassion as an ongoing influence throughout the duration of their

service. Foster parents stated that they initiate the foster parenting experience due to

feelings of compassion. However, some of the participants indicated that compassion also

explains retention influencing foster parents to provide 2 years or more of service. When

describing the emotions involved in the foster parenting role and how foster parents make

placements work, foster parents described compassion as an element of inspiration.

Foster parents even indicated that compassion helps them to cope with emotions such as

anger and frustration by experiencing happiness and fulfillment.

According ot FP8,

> You got to figure out how to change that model somehow and get their mind out of this is a bad day. Now this is a great day. Um, a parent that dies, you got to figure out how, how can I change this bad day and make it a better day when next year comes. And you're always anticipating the negativity of the situation, the child, but you're always planning for the positivity and you're doing everything you can to pump positivity into that child to make that day better.

Further, FP2 shared,

> I think that if you would see one, just one positive change, you know, then that would make it, that would make it worth it, you know, it'd be worth, it all be all worth the long days, the stress and, you know, working with a house full of kids that are having issues. Just, just that one positive change that you knew that you were a part of. I think that that's what really stands out to me.

FP10 stated the following:

> There's anger at some of the choices that they make. There's joy. Um, when you see a smile come across their face that you haven't seen in a long time, um, there's sadness. If they leave, uh, there's happiness and great joy if you adopt. Um, so I, I mean, frustration, I think every emotion that you can truly imagine is seen and had during fostering and, but the greatest joy or the greatest emotion to me is the joy, because they're a blessing when people say, oh, you're such a blessing to those kids. I turn around and say, no, you don't understand. I couldn't have children. Biologically, these kids are a blessing to me.

Foster parents are very concerned about the needs of foster youth and experience compassion when being exposed to the foster child's story. Compassion explains both the recruitment and retention of foster parents, according to foster parents. The next theme is the foster parent's ability to obtain relevant training and helpful resources.

Theme 2: Ability to Seek Relevant Training and Helpful Resources

Foster parents explained 15 times in the interviews that adequate resources and relevant training helped them provide foster parenting services for 2 years or more. When asked how foster parents make a challenging placement work, foster parents explained that ongoing training, adequate resources, and team support were among the most influential elements that helped in their success. Some foster parents described foster parent resignation as being triggered by improper training or inadequate resources. While foster parents are adamant that they do not serve for financial gain, they say that adequate financial help relieves them of emotional stress because they know they will be able to meet the day-to-day needs of the foster child. One foster parent ascribed legal policy as a means of support when those polices protect the rights of foster parents and foster children. Among these types of services, some foster parents referenced professional services such as individual therapy, family therapy, and adoption therapy as helpful resources when the services were on point with the needs of the foster home.

According to FP8,

There is no way you could do this without training. Droves of people have quit being foster parents because they can't do this. If you don't have that type of training, there's never going to be success in a foster home. That foster parent has

to be trained to try to understand that there are going to be more bad days in our good days, but the good days are going to be great days.

FP6 shared,

I think they need more one-on-one training. Um, and when training is done, I think it needs to be a little more, uh eye-opening for them. I think we, um, we can't decode a lot of things and we don't give them, we don't prepare people for the worst outcomes, we planned for the best, but they don't expect the worst. I think that they need, I think they need more training and more avenues of, to make themselves better when new techniques or whatever.

FP7 said,

Training, consistent training. I mean, it's because you get your training upfront, but that upfront training doesn't cover everything that's going to happen. So you have to have someone (a coach) that can help them that can teach them how to deal with stuff as it comes up.

Further, FP10 shared the following:

Family to family was just the, um, you know, now it's called shared parenting. Just the shared parenting piece, I think was the most difficult for us with some of the children. Now, some of our kids now we have fostered 45 kids with the three we have right now. Um, and out of those only three, I do not have contact with at all at this point, the rest of them I have contact with. And that was because even the ones that we went back with, we built relationships with the parents, um, for

several reasons. But it was, that was the most difficult part because you had to get

past your own bias. We had to get past the I'm so angry that you hurt these kids.

FP6 said,

So you have to, you have to kind of do that (manage a challenging behavior) in a

way so that you're not escalating, if that makes sense what I'm trying to say, but,

um, but yeah, the, training and the tools that they helped us learn to do that is, was

very important because if you, if you didn't have those tools, then you would have

a kid just off the wall escalating.

FP8 shared,

You're never going to give a foster parent financially what they feel they need,

because it's always going to change, but you want to be able to secure them

financially so that it doesn't create a burden on their life.

According to FP:8, "Knowing that the law stands behind foster care, knowing that the

law stands behind the betterment of children, knowing that the law will secure the safety

of children from parents who have criminal issues in their life."

FP6 stated,

Therapy. What we're trying the therapeutic along with what doc has set up here.

Um, listen, I, I'm not going to lie. It's it's been freaking hard. Like I'm telling

you, you go in at six in the morning and you don't get off till 10 o'clock at night.

FP10 shared,

Um, I think the most important resource that I, that helped me was the adoption

therapy. Um, and that, that just really helped give me tools as we were kind of

going through specific behaviors and situations and, you know, as they were, you

know, going through emotions, um, regarding the adoption specifically, but, um,

moving into our home, uh, that really helped to look at specific issues and handle

them with, you know, the best, the best things that we could do at that moment.

Um, and it wasn't just like a blanket statement. It was, you know, specifically to

them and to our family dynamic.

Having the ability to connect with a significant other, a community of faith,

professional workers as well as having the ability to rely on a parental support system

were other types of resources listed by foster parents. Multiple foster parents described

their spouse as their primary resource and partner in their fostering situation. Although

the type of social support is described differently from one foster parent to the other, it

was clear that social and emotional support resources provided significant aid to the

foster parenting role. Perhaps this foster parent said it best:

FP10 shared the following:

I Thank God all the time for our village. We have other foster parent friends, um,

that completely understand because they're in the same situation as us. So if we

have dinner plans and we have to cancel, they get it. Um, you need friends that

have that understanding that they, you know, they want to go do things with you.

Um, but they need to understand that at any moment, something could happen

that you can't, you could get a call for a foster kid and you have to cancel that

foster kid could have a crisis and you have to cancel. Just to be there to say, you

know, I'm praying for you. It's okay. If you need, if you need to just chill out,

come to my house or, you know, if you need a break, let me watch the kids for a

little bit. Um, you need that, that village. Um, I mean, I, I don't think you can do

this alone. And then the other thing of course is, and on top of the village is Jesus.

Theme 3: Ability to Employ Parenting Tips That Create Success

When asked how to make a typical day work or what part of the experience is

going well, foster parents responded by listing parenting tips they found successful and

increased foster parent retention to 2 years or more. An overwhelming majority of foster

parents insisted on a structured, well planned, consistent, detailed, organized, and flexible

routine as a primary parenting tip for success. Foster parents also explained that an

involved parent-child relationship is paramount to being able to connect and help the

youth acclimate to the fostering situation. Primarily, foster parents stated that the

parenting style is effective when the parental response is predictable, clear, and flexible.

Foster parents described great value in having consistent and obtainable expectations for

the foster children to help in the foster child's development. Foster parents listed

additional tips such as maintaining fair and consistent chores, having family meetings to

facilitate communication streams, and even streamlined and diverse discipline

techniques. One foster parent stated that using a job jar as a disciplinary tool was helpful.

Foster parents measured the success of a parting tip if the tip created success and trained

the foster child. Some examples are as follows:

FP8 explained,

Routine consistency? Um, openness, honesty, determination, um, sticking to the

same exact function on a daily basis. It can't be just routine. It has to be a daily

function and you have to anticipate the worst and plan for the best. Your, your

hope is you want good things to happen that day, but you've got to anticipate that

you're going to have conflicts on a daily basis, but you always want to plan for

the best. So it is better to have a plan and not need it than to need a plan and not

have it.

FP8 shared,

Giving the child room to grow in their own time, timeframe, giving them the

chance to grow and mature themselves. If you don't give the child the chance to

develop their own self growth, you can't let them be this plastic, plastic doll that

you just pick up and put down. They have, they are a living, breathing, human

being that has to grow through their own struggles and it's going to be at their

pace. Success is trial and error.

FP5 offered the following:

First of all, you have to meet them where they're at. Um, again, there's a lot of

flexibility that has to go on here. You cannot expect them to give you respect right

off the bat. Um, that has to be a mutual understanding. They have to earn it, you

have to earn it. Um, and just being willing to walk with them through everything

that they need to do. So when I'm getting to know, uh, a child, I want to actually

know them and spend time with them that they know that they're important

enough that if something were to go on or something were to happen, um, I

honestly mean my word. I will find them and talk with them and help them walk

through the situation. So it's, you kind of have to navigate it. And each kid is

different.

FP7 said,

Flexibility, um, consistency and structure, I would think would be the three main

things being flexible because things change at the drop of a hat. I try, you know, I

fell short, I'm sure just like everybody, but I tried to be the same every day. Uh,

you know, not to give them a different, you know, say yes one day then say no,

the next, but, you know, that happens of course. And then just having structure,

you know, like with, you know, making sure they did their part and things like

that. So, I would say flexibility, structure and consistency.

FP6 explained,

So just having expectations, you know, and having high expectations, but not so

much so that they can't meet the expectation. Um, and even coming alongside of

them, you know, and, you know, like we learned, you know, something pops into

my head like hurdle help, you know, helping them, you know, with the char, you

know, again, just working together as a team, just wanting them to be successful,

you know, not looking for opportunities for them to be unsuccessful, but to want

them to be successful and to, to vocalize that even to them and show them by your

actions that you want them to be successful.

According to FP4,

I love these kids, heart and soul, but I won't let them get away with anything. And

so most people are not afraid to come to me and say, Hey, we have a child has this

issue. Will you please come and talk with them? And I do, um, I do it in love, but I, as I'm talking to them, I call them to a higher standard. And, um, nine times out of 10 that's a lot of times when they call me to talk to me, that's what, that's what it's about. Uh, so they, they say, we need your mama side. I say, okay.

According to FP3,

Being organized, knowing, planning your day around whatever events that you have. So, I mean, if there's, um, appointments or whatever, it may be making sure that you plan accordingly, um, and always expect a hiccup because something's always going to happen. That's going to change the situation.

FP1 provided the following answer:

Structure, structure, and stability and consistent they work. That's, that's what works. You have to have a routine. You have, the kids have to know what's coming. They have to know if they screw up, what's going to happen in response to that bottom line. And they have to know that, um, you know, that that's their choice and that's their decision that they're making. They're either going to make a good choice and do the right thing, or they're going to make a bad choice. And then they're going to get consequences for that. So, but it's either way, you're either going to get a good consequence or a bad consequence. So structure, stability and consistency is for real, what gets you through a day, even when outburst occur, because if you've got that routine down, pat, and those kids know what they're getting, what they, um, what they know what's coming, they know what's.

According to FP10,

We had a lot of the teens in the home and they would get mad because I was so, and so's not doing their dishes in the upstairs kitchen. And I would say, bring it to family meeting and boys, some of them would come with a notebook to family meeting it, just cut down on the, fighting it cut down on the arguing in the house because they could come to us and we'd say, okay, bring that to family meeting because we really need to discuss that. And they, they felt heard and they felt like they had a part in the boundary making and in the law making, if you want to call it that, or the rule making, they had a part in that

FP9 shared,

My wife came up with a job jar. We had a, we had a Mason jar and she took a note paper and made these different jobs and stuff around the house like chores. And you know, kids pick it out and do the chore. One of the kids who is now grown told us one time he should, because he used to complain about having to do dishes, have to learn how to cook. And he said, why can't, you know, the boys should be out, you know, doing yard work and stuff like that. And it was life skills. We were trying to change him. So he went after he grew up and he told my wife, he said, mom, he got married. He said, mom. He said, uh, I'm so glad you taught me all these things. He said, because when I got married, my wife, I would have starved. And now that's what he does. He's a cook. He's a chef.

Theme 4: Being An Emotionally Invested Foster Parent

All of the foster parents responded when asked about what emotions were involved. According to foster parents, they encounter various emotions such as anger, gratification, happiness, sadness, helplessness, love, joy, and disappointment daily. In addition to the emotions they experience, foster parents also described the emotions involved with their fostering situation in general from other adults involved and the foster child. The foster parent participants collectively described emotional involvement as necessary for foster parent retention of 2 years or more. Particularly, holidays and birthdays were listed among foster parents as being emotionally difficult days. The samples below explain the emotional experience of the foster parents.

> FP5 shared,
>
> You are physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally involved. You are involved 100% with the youth you are working with. It is our mind, body, soul, and spirit that are connected to the at-risk youth. You cannot subtract any from the list and be able to minister to the youth, guide the youth, or lead them to a better way. You minister to them like you would minister to your biological child. If you are not fully involved, it will not do for you or for the foster child what it needs to do.

According to FP9, "The emotions they are going through just touch you, man. I mean, we just keep on going, man. That is why our focus is to just show them love." FP4 said,

> Um, the question is what emotions are involved in working with, with foster youth? Um, all of the emotions. So you are physically, spiritually, um, mentally, I

think I said emotionally involved, you're involved a hundred percent when you are working with, at risk youth. It is our mind, body, soul, and spirit. Um, you cannot subtract one or two and be able to minister to them or guide them or lead them the way that you need to, if it's not rolled all into one ministering to them as like ministering to your own children, you have to be fully invested or doing it will not do what it needs to do for you and or for the use involves that you're helping.

Further, according to FP6, "I mean, your emotions, you can be happy one minute and crying the next, because this kid had a great moment."

FP10 stated the following in their interview:

There were times that we had to bite our tongues because we weren't past it, but we still had to treat the birth family with respect and support because two reasons, um, if you end up adopting the kids, okay, wonderful. They may not be a part of the kid's life, but at some point that kid is going to want to find their, you know, biological family. And if you've completely alienated them, that's going to be a hard conversation and a hard thing. But our big thing was reunification was always the first goal. And if you're going back to your mom, I want to be able to see you. I want to be able to be a support for your mother, that if she needs a babysitter, I'm the first person she calls, or if she's getting into trouble or Phil's herself getting into trouble, call me, you know, don't let, don't let it go down to where the kids are being hurt.

FP10 expanded, stating,

You hurt for them. Um, you get angry, you're, you're angry at, what's been done to them. And then there's anger at some of the choices that they make. There's joy. Um, when you see a smile come across their face that you haven't seen in a long time, um, there's sadness. If they leave, uh, there's happiness and great joy if you adopt. Um, so I, I mean, frustration, I think every emotion that you can truly imagine is seen and had during fostering and, but the greatest joy or the greatest emotion to me is the joy, because they're a blessing when people say, oh, you're such a blessing to those kids.

According to FP9,

The emotions start coming out from their childhood, what they had to grow up in and holidays birthdays. And that really gets me, man. And, and sometimes I even, you know, you, you may get, I get a little bit angry if I, if I see, you know, like when they would go to court, you know, and their biological parent would be saying something and you're on the edge of your seat. You're wanting to say something, but you can't, man. You just feel, you just feel for these kids, man, the emotions that they're going through. And it just, it just touches you man. And I, we just keep on going, man.

FP6 shared,

Well, sometimes I feel like they just don't care. I mean, that's a pretty negative answer, but I feel like that if you're not doing everything that you know, that you could do for that kid, whether it's through your training, your degree, your, um,

place in, in work in general, like what you do, what you're supposed to do, you

know, if you're not giving a hundred percent, then I feel like you don't care.

According to FP5,

Um, as a foster parent, it was probably a hardest experience I've ever done or

gone through in my entire life. Um, however it wa it was, and still is the most

rewarding simply because I have seen the growth, um, in our boys. And I know

that, um, if, and I know I don't want this to sound arrogant, but I know that if we

wouldn't have given them a home, they would not be, um, as successful as they

are, especially our youngest one who has, you know, grown by leaps and bounds

and he is stable and he is grown now and he's doing great.

FP1 offered,

Well, I think that you have to, um, have a desire to work with the foster care

population. Um, I believe that you have to exhibit patience, perseverance, um,

flexibility, um, you know, just being willing to be hurt yourself because, you

know, at times, you know, the workers, you know, we're trying to find validation

from the youth. And to me, that's not the right way. You know, we're not there

for the youth to encourage us and build us up, you know, we're there to build

them up. Um, you have to have thick skin, you know, you, um, you have to be

able to let things roll off your back at times and not take things personal, you

know, because the times that particular youth might be screaming and cussing and

yelling at you, and they're not even mad at you, they're just feeling comfortable

enough and safe enough to be able to do that to you, knowing that you're not

going to hurt them, but all along, they're up with that and hurting majorly about something else. So I think it takes, it takes all those things and probably a lot more than what I said.

FP9 stated the following:

I'll tell you what really gets me. Brother is on holidays, man. Man, just all the emotions start coming out from their, their, their childhood, what they had to grow up in and holidays birthdays. And that really gets man. And, and sometimes I even, you know, you, you may get, I get a little bit angry if I, if I see, you know, like when they would go to court, you know, and their biological parent would be saying something and going through them and, and you're on the edge of your seat. You're wanting to say something, but you can't, man. You just feel, you just feel for these kids, man, the emotions that they're going through. And it just, it just touches you man. And I, we just keep on going, man. And just try to just try to love on them. That's that's my that's my main focus, man, is just try to just try to show them, love, man.

Finally, according to FP5,

I feel like I had every emotion possible when I was fostering. I had happiness and joy. I had fulfillment. I also had anger and frustration and sadness and disappointment. Um, I also felt, um, angry towards their biological families just because I felt like they were let down and disappointed over and over and over. And there was not much that I could really do to stop that. I just kind of had to sit by and watch it. And that was very, um, difficult to deal with. Uh, we also had a

lot of behavioral challenges to overcome, um, especially with our oldest that we

fostered. Um, but really for both of them, they each had their own challenges. So

there were a lot of emotions involved in that. And I had to learn to set my

emotions aside and consider what was best for them over what I was feeling.

Theme 5: Meaningful Foster Parent to Foster Child Relationship

Foster parents described a meaningful connection to foster youth and even

described the relationship as impacting their decision to continue foster parenting

services for 2 years or more. When asked what makes the foster parent relationship work

with foster youth, foster parents replied by saying that foster parents talking openly to

foster youth, keeping the relationship genuine, showing affection through gifts and

celebrations, and caring for their basic needs all impacted their relationship with foster

youth. Some foster parents stated that they create specific and genuine one-on-one

parent-child date nights with foster youth. Foster parents described great success at

developing a relationship with foster youth when they showed an interest in the foster

child, met the foster child's needs consistently, thought ahead to forecast the needs of the

foster child and prepared for those needs, showed respect, allowed open communication,

and were transparent with information. Foster parents explained that the relationship's

success hinges upon trust for both parties and the foster child's confidence in the foster

parent to create and maintain a safe environment. Samples from the interview data are

provided below.

FP8 stated,

You have to win. You have to win their trust. You, you can't be that kind of person to say, I'm the one in charge and you're going to listen to me. That's never going to work. You have to meet them where they're at. You have to, you have to buy into what's going on with them and help them buy into you because they, they could care less. What you have to say. It's all going to be about how you really handle yourself. And in the midst of crisis, how do you handle yourself in the midst of crisis? How do you handle yourself when you're in the middle of a negativity and you're having a bad day and things are going wrong, how do you handle that? And that child's seen that in you, in your, uh, demonstration, in your physical progression of who you are, that's what makes that child successful. That's the difference. And that's how they buy into it. But that has to be by meeting them where they're at. You, you can't expect them to all of a sudden changed their life because, oh, Hey, this is great. I'm living in your own.

According to FP1,

And I believe that that, that just being real with the youth, you know, um, not sharing your whole life story with them, but just showing them how human you are at a time that, you know, you yourself or aggravated or frustrated or need to step away, um, building relationship takes time. But I think that it's a very important part. Um, I've heard it said before that that rules without relationship equals rebellion. So, you know, building relationship, you know, um, again, going back to the word consistent, just being consistent, you know, working with any particular foster child, any particular youth, just being consistent, um, just being,

being real, being transparent, um, and just letting it take the time that it needs to

take, you know, not rushing into a relationship, you know? Um, but just letting,

um, the youth that you were working with allowed you to be a part of their life as

much as they want it to, and just respecting them, respecting them and just

building relationships.

Further, FP2 said,

Um, I think, I think it's really important to be transparent. Um, and just to, to

show them, you know, when they do make those little areas in life that they've

made an improvement, it might not seem like a big deal, but to praise them for

that to say, Hey, you know, you did a better job on your chore today than you did

yesterday, even though it might not have been a big deal to other people just to

praise them for that and say, Hey, you know, I noticed that you, you put in an

extra special effort on, on this today, and I think that's important to praise them.

FP3 said,

You keep it personable. Um, you want to treat the children, the youth that are in

your care, um, somewhat as your own. You don't want to treat them outside of

that. Uh, but yet you still also have to understand that they are, um, if you want to

call them quote a client. Um, and so you still have to have that professionalism on

it, so.

According to FP5,

Um, I was not always the greatest at it and to be honest, I'm still not the greatest

at it. Even after we have adopted, um, my husband is probably better at it than I

am. Um, but what I try to do is just, you know, talk to them as openly. And

honestly, as I can, um, I show affection by giving gifts and, you know, making

sure their needs are met. So I would always try to, you know, build and work on

our relationship by, you know, making sure they have what they needed and

talking to them about things they might need for school or, you know, things that

they might not automatically feel comfortable just coming up to me and asking

me for, I would try to go ahead and provide for them or bring up the subject. So

they would feel comfortable to, to talk to me about things.

FP7 said, "Like you're not going to have a relationship the first day, but consistency can

also mean like your willingness to listen, your willingness to respond to when they need

help to anything when they're in need, and your willingness," and "Yeah. It builds trust."

Some foster parents place such a high priority on making the relationship work

with at-risk youth that they make it a point of spiritual priority. Foster parents claim that

spirituality helps to sustain the foster parenting relationship and encourages the foster

child to be open when communicating with the foster parent. Examples of these response

are provided below.

FP4 shared,

And make the relationship work prayer, to pray, to ask God, to show me what he

sees in those children and what they are dealing with that they would never tell

anyone else. So I know exactly how to pray so that it goes just beyond a job. It is

a ministry that, um, that he allows me to see things that they may not share with

other people so that when our relationship gets to that trust factor, I can be able to

minister to them, um, through that means.

Foster parents are motivated by a drive to help foster youth, develop a healthy

relationship with foster children, and to see the foster child achieve success in their life.

Foster care workers may need to do more to help foster parents achieve success to

increase the retention of foster parents. Foster parents may be able to express their

specific ambitions to help foster children be successful. As a result, foster care workers

can align the needs of foster youth to the ambitions of foster parents.

Research Question Two

The second question explored how policy influences foster parent retention. The

second research question was, How can Tennessee policy be shaped by foster parent

experiences to effectively promote foster parent retention? Foster parents were asked

questions about the features of key policy issues in Tennessee, foster parenting training,

needs resources, support, and the influence of other foster care workers. Two significant

themes emerged from the research in response to the second research question: the

provision of prompt and updated resources and the ability to access relevant training and

instruction.

Theme 6: Provision of Prompt and Updated Resources

Foster parents reported that resources must be punctual and updated to help

increase foster parent retention. Foster parents explained that they need a broad range of

resources to effectively provide foster parenting services. Foster parents listed the

following recurring examples of resources in the interview data: (a) financial support for

general care, (b) team support, (c) professional foster-child services, (d) spiritual care, (e) emotional support, (f) professional clinical support, (g) support with educational needs, and (h) and support with extracurricular activities. While foster parents stated that they are supported by policy and laws that protect their rights, they also advocated for policy to be shaped so that policy is relevant and up to date. Foster parents described a need for financial support that adequately equips them to meet the needs of the foster youth. Foster parents agreed with Tennessee policy 16.29. Foster parents need financial support for clothing, allowance, transportation, shelter, food, and other financial needs that accrue from taking care of foster youth. Foster parents explained they need to be included as valuable team members, have support to meet the needs of the foster child, and have good communication with other adults and service providers involved in their child's foster care experience. Foster parents said they need reliable team support to share information and ideas regarding the child's experience, provide emotional support to the foster parent and the child, help meet the general needs of the foster youth, and coordinate care from a legal and medical perspective.

Especially, foster parents stated they needed more help with transportation. Some foster parents explained that they need more authority in professional foster care meetings that influence the child, indicating that the Tennessee Foster Care Bill of Rights must be updated to suit the needs of the foster parents. Foster parents made mention of needing spiritual and emotional resources. In their interviews, multiple foster parents explained that they needed clinical support to process information. All 10 foster parents described the significance of emotional, social, and spiritual support systems. Lastly,

foster parents called for unity among the adults caring for the youth to bring peace and improve the experience for the foster youth by listening to the foster child's opinions. Examples from the interview data are provided below:

FP8 said,

Foster parents, other adults, child welfare workers, state workers, private agency workers, case managers, trainers, supervisors, administrations, attorneys, and judges all find unity in one goal. The goal is the betterment of children. One central goal and one unified concept. If the team is not unified, the foster parent will not be successful. If the team is unified, then the child will be free to live a moral life in a world of negativity, disgrace, and abuse. That is unity.

FP10 shared,

They (foster parents) need an amazing support system. Um, they need family around them, friends around them, um, a foster care team around them that are going to be available at, you know, even a moment's notice. Um, especially if you know both of the foster parents work outside of the home. Um, you know, schedules can be tricky, getting kids to appointments and, you know, just even sports activities or, you know, things like that. And if they have other, um, children in the home, you know, family life can be very busy. So I think a support system, um, for, you know, getting kids places, but also just to hear, um, that parent at out, um, because it is a lot of heavy emotions and sometimes you do need that safe person that you can vent to and talk to. So I do appreciate our case managers in that sense, because I could go directly to them and let them know

what I was feeling. And even if they didn't have an answer for the, or a solution,

they could just listen. And that was a big deal.

According to FP1,

And make the relationship work prayer? To pray, to ask God to show me what he

sees in children and what they are dealing with, that they would never tell anyone

else. So I know exactly how to pray so that it goes just beyond a job. It is a

ministry that, um, that he allows me to see things that they may not share with

other people so that when our relationship gets to that trust factor, I can be able to

minister to them, um, through that means.

FP8 also said,

Support all agencies support Um, they need to know that their voice is heard.

There needs to be full disclosure to foster parents. You're never going to give a

foster parent financially what they feel they need, because it's always going to

change, but you want to be able to secure them financially so that it doesn't create

a burden on their life. Um, so again, support every aspect the agency has to

support the foster parent. The state has to support the foster parent. The people

around has to the team has to support the foster parent. If the team is not on the

same page, the foster parent is never going to be successful. And if you can't

support the foster parent, they're never going to be successful.

According to FP8,

All my references is all about Tennessee because I've had the privilege to work

with so many incredibly amazing people that have a hunger and a desire. And that

support is paramount. And it all goes back to that unity and that support and that

structure and the fact that each person in each role that they have centralized for

one thing, children have rights. That's the one specific thing that is paramount,

that children have rights and children have a right to be heard.

FP4 shared,

The number one thing I believe is that there are times that they receive a child and

they do not have all of the, um, information on the child that could have really

helped them to understand and help the child to acclimate better in their house.

Um, so I think one of the main things is that when placing a child into a foster

home, most foster parents want as much accurate information. And even if people

feel like they're going to be scared away, I've heard several foster parents say I'd

rather see all of the bad and know what I'm getting into upfront, then discover to

discover it later. And it ended up possibly hurting or harming the placement of the

child in our house or someone else in the house.

FP3 succinctly said, "Knowing that other people were there to back me up in a decision

that I made."

FP7 shared the following:

More clinical needs to be involved with the because, um, foster parents need to

process too. And I think sometimes they get overlooked because we all say we're

here for the kids, which we are. However, they are people too, and they've been

through stuff as well. And sometimes it's just nice to be able to, uh, I think it

would be nice to be able to walk through a situation that happened and be able to

talk about it and process. And, um, maybe have, I don't want to say closure, but

teachable moment for us.

FP6 said,

We were foster parents with the first child. We never got disclosure of sexual, um,

events that had happened in his life. And if we would have gotten disclosure, if

we to have that information, we wouldn't have took that child in which would

have been, um, no trauma for him, no trauma for us, no trauma for our son would

the second, uh, child that we took in, it was a girl. And, um, you know, she, she

just, she disrupted herself, uh, because she asked to be moved back. We didn't

want her to leave. She asked for that, but you know, if we would have had some

kind of person to talk to maybe through that event, or maybe have had a mediator

come in and brought the kid in with us so that we could have gotten closure on

that whole experience, that would have been nice because everybody just thinks

about what this is doing to the child. Well, what is this doing to the caregivers, the

foster parents, and maybe their kids, if they have kids of their own, like, it's just

traumatic for everybody.

According to FP10,

A lot of times there's no family therapy for the foster family and the child. And I

think sometimes there needs to be that even if it's once a month, um, that a

therapist, um, speaks with the foster family and the foster child, because one of

two things is going to happen with that foster child. They're going to reunite. But

during that reunification period, they still need that strong, um, relationship with

the foster family. Um, and then, um, the other thing that can happen is adoption and the, that therapy with the foster family can be a huge help in that. So I think that's a good, I think an educational liaison is a good resource, um, with teams to help with anything at the school because a lot of times they think, oh, this child is in foster care and sometimes they'll literally just pass on by like it's no big deal, no IEP, no nothing.

FP9 said,

Make sure you have sports to keep em active. They always need to, kids always need to be active because sometimes that gets, that gets their mind off the current situation that they're in. So yeah, I would say sports man. That's a real good one to try to get, try to get there much and try to get their mind the best you can off the situation that they're in because kids in foster care, they, they don't, they don't want to get, they don't want to get that label.

FP5 shared,

Um, I think the most important resource that I, that helped me was the adoption therapy. Um, and that, that just really helped give me tools as we were kind of going through specific behaviors and situations and, you know, as they were, you know, going through emotions, um, regarding the adoption specifically, but, um, moving into our home, uh, that really helped to look at specific issues and handle them with, you know, the best, the best things that we could do at that moment. Um, and it wasn't just like a blanket statement. It was, you know, specifically to them and to our family dynamic.

Finally, FP7 said,

> Um, well, I believe that when the workers, um, follow the rules and they put into
>
> practice, they're training to the best of their ability, that that keeps the youth safe
>
> because during training, you know, we're taught to do things appropriate, you
>
> know, that the safety of the youth is of utmost importance. And I just think doing
>
> our job, um, you know, keeping eyes on them, uh, not just being, being there, but,
>
> you know, being active is good in the house. Um, it takes a lot, you know, it's a
>
> lot, but it's worth it. Um, you know, so I would just say, um, keeping eyes on the
>
> youth and being an active part of their day, help them be safe. And then of course,
>
> following the rules.

Theme 7: Ability to Access Relevant Training and Instruction

Foster parents made 15 significant comments regarding the influence of training

and the need for improvement in educational programs. Collectively, foster parents

attributed much of their success to their training experience; however, foster parents

noted shortfalls in training programs. Foster parents agreed that training can be improved,

and training policy is shaped to be more effective at preparing foster parents to meet the

needs of at-risk youth and to increase foster parent retention. Foster parents listed the

following training enhancement possibilities: youth discipline, working with the

biological family, caring for children who have experienced trauma, and the quality of

the training experience for the foster parent. Foster parents advocated for an improved

training experience as well as improved ongoing training experience. Some foster parents

asked for one-on-one training and a foster parent coaching service installment. Foster

parents required more information on how to parent, discipline, and support children who have experienced trauma from a crisis management perspective. Examples from the data are as follows:

According to FP10,

Um, I think one of the best trainings for us was the family to family training. It was also called shared parenting. Just the shared parenting piece, I think was the most difficult for us with some of the children. Now, some of our kids now we have fostered 45 kids with the three we have right now. Um, and out of those only three, I do not have contact with at all at this point, the rest of them I have contact with. And that was because even the ones that we went back with, we built relationships with the parents, um, for several reasons. But it was, that was the most difficult part because you had to get past your own bias. We had to get past the I'm so angry that you hurt these kids.

FP6 said, "(Foster parents need) consistent (on-going) training. Because you get your training upfront, but that upfront training doesn't cover everything that's going to happen," and "So, you have to have someone that can help foster parents that can teach them how to deal with stuff as it comes up."

FP1 shared the following:

I think that you have to take things slowly but surely because you might have a 15 year old that has been through so much trauma that they may act like a five year old and, you know, people, people will notice that and, you know, maybe wonder why, but I think, you know, just being understanding and taking, taking it one step

at a time, you know, you know, even taking baby steps, you know, just realizing

that it's a person, you know, you know, a youth has been traumatized so badly

that it's gonna take quite a while for them to start acting their age, so to speak.

Um, again, it's trying to understand, you know, to the best of your ability, you

know, where they're coming from. And that trauma is very real and trauma can

really affect people in negative ways.

Furthermore, FP10 said,

Trauma needs, um, special needs as far as, you know, autism, everything, being

able to see that schedule written down in the house and knowing when your

therapy is and, and just trying to stick to that schedule as much as possible. And

then, um, the only area that I say that it kinda changes is if you do have plans to

go somewhere special, we learned early on surprise is much better than

disappointment.

FP8 shared,

There is no way you could do this without training. Foster parents can't do it

when there's nobody there to support them. If you can't support the foster parent

emotionally, uh, biggest part is just being there, supporting them, you know,

having, having their side, having an ear there. Uh, if you don't have that type of

training, there's never going to be success in a foster home that foster parent has

to be trained to try to understand that there are going to be more bad days in our

good days, but the good days are going to be great days. And without training,

there is no succeeding in the role of foster care. And I am absolutely a hundred

percent grateful for the training. I received the training that I was part of helping

to redevelop and the training that I used to utilize to train foster parents and house

parents with that.

FP3 said,

Hands-on experience of learning, how to deal day to day, um, With, uh, with the

situations of what was going on because each kid's different. You have to deal

with each youth differently. So you may kid little Billy May be able to do it one

way, but yet the same, the, his roommate, you can't deal with the same way. You

have to deal with them and come out a different approach.

FP3 elaborated,

I think they need more one-on-one training. Um, a and when training is done, I

think it needs to be a little more, uh eye-opening for them. Um, I think a lot of the

times that, um, in this line of work, um, and when I say we, I just mean it as an, as

a, as a field of work. I think we, um, we can't decode a lot of things and we don't

give them, we don't prepare people for the worst outcomes we planned for the

best, but they don't expect the worst. I think that they need, I think they need

more training and more avenues of, to make themselves better when new

techniques or whatever.

FP6 said, "Training, consistent training? I mean, it's because you get your training

upfront, but that uproot training doesn't cover everything that's going to happen," and

"So you have to have someone that can help them that can teach them how to deal with

stuff as it comes up."

According to FP5,

I had a, a lot of learning to do when it comes to parenting a teenager because I had never parented a teenager up to that point. Um, but I believe that we classes that I have, um, taken in my bachelors and master's degree along with, um, education I received as a case worker.

FP6 said,

And sometimes, you know, they, they may get upset with you and they're not really upset with you. You have to disconnect, you have to make yourself step back a little bit to where you're not getting emotionally involved in the situation, because when you do that, then they may get upset and it just kind of escalate. So you have to, you have to kind of do that in a way so that you're not having an escalate, if that makes sense what I'm trying to say, but, um, but yeah, the, the, the training and the tools that they helped us learn to do that is, was very important because if you, if you didn't have those tools, then you would have a kid just off the wall escalating

Finally, FP5 said, "that was very … difficult to deal with. We also had a lot of behavioral challenges to overcome … especially with our oldest that we fostered. Um, but really for both of them, they each had their own challenges."

Summary

I aimed to explore the perceptions of foster parents who foster youth in Tennessee. Foster parent responses provided rich data for both research questions of this study. Data saturation was evidenced by reoccurring themes in the data. Foster parents

explained that they experience retention by showing compassion, seeking relevant and punctual resources, employing parenting tips that help create success, being emotionally invested, creating a meaningful relationship with the foster child, having access to prompt and updated resources, and applying relevant training.

The qualitative research design generated data that helped to explain foster parent retention and recommendations for foster care policymakers in Tennessee. In Chapter 4, I delivered an organized presentation of the data. In Chapter 5, I summarize the key findings and interpret the findings through the theoretical concepts of this research study. Lastly, I suggest policy implementations from the data and explain how policymakers can use the research study to shape foster care policy in Tennessee continually.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this qualitative, I study aimed to explore the retention of foster parents who parent at-risk youth in Tennessee. Tennessee has too few foster parents to care for foster children in the custody of the state of Tennessee. The Tennessee Department of Children's Services (2020) reported in their annual report that there were 4,077 youth in need of a foster home and only 2,921 available foster homes. The literature review revealed a gap in policy data illustrating that Tennessee policy is not adequately promoting foster parent retention. The lack of foster homes in Tennessee increases placement instability, leading to placement disruptions. Placement instability contributes to system trauma, placing foster children in danger.

In this study, I used a qualitative research design to generate data by interviewing foster parents, reviewing archival data, and collecting field notes. The interview protocol prompted foster parents to share their experiences to help explain their retention. The data may be used to inform policymakers in Tennessee to shape policy to increase foster parent retention. After analyzing the data, I identified seven themes: (a) showing compassion, (b) the ability to seek relevant training and helpful resources, (c) the ability to employ parenting tips that create success, (d) being an emotionally invested foster parent, (e) meaningful foster parent to foster child relationship, (f) provision of prompt and updated resources, and (g) ability to access relevant training and instruction. In addition to informing public policymakers, the results from my study may also be used to inform policymakers of private agencies, foster parent advocates, and other foster care

stakeholders. Ultimately, the results may improve the quality of services offered to foster children and their biological families. In this chapter, I include the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications for social change, and the chapter conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

The data generated from my study correlate to the findings in the literature review and contribute new information to explaining foster parent retention in Tennessee. The data were generated from 10 foster parent interviews with collective fostering experience of more than 135 years. The analysis revealed the following themes that help explain foster parent retention in Tennessee: (a) showing compassion, (b) the ability to seek relevant training and helpful resources, (c) the ability to employ parenting tips that create success, (d) being an emotionally invested foster parent, (e) meaningful foster parent to foster child relationship, (f) provision of prompt and updated resources, and (g) ability to access relevant training and instruction. In the next section, I correlate the findings from my study to the research data and interpret the data through the theoretical framework.

Showing Compassion

Foster parents are motivated by factors such as a foster parent's level of compassion for the foster child and the fostering situation. Foster parent interview data consistently showed that committed foster parents are compassionate about the foster child and the fostering situation. The interview data are consistent with findings from the literature review. Ahn et al. (2017) believed that foster parents are motivated by a desire to positively impact youth (p. 479). Foster parents are motivated by their compassion for

the foster child, expressed by unconditional commitment, feelings of joy when children are successful, and the foster parent's ability to meet the needs of the foster child (Berrick et al., 2011, p. 273; Daniel, 2011, p. 914). The foster child's needs are not the only element influencing foster parents' compassion. Interview data suggest that a foster parent's context and experience as an at-risk youth drives compassion. The unfortunate situations of foster children and foster parents as at-risk youth inspire foster parents to help these children.

Foster parent interviews confirmed earlier findings in the literature review showing that foster parents express a will to see the lives of at-risk youth improve through compassion. Foster parents are compassionate toward the overall development of foster children. Foster children who are behind developmentally become a priority for foster parents. During interviews, foster parents explained that feelings of compassion are driven by their spirituality. Foster parent compassion may indicate the quality of services a foster parent will provide. Tennessee policymakers may benefit from exploring more ways to understand foster parent compassion when recruiting and retaining foster parents by employing techniques from this study's theoretical framework. For example, identifying factors of compassion that impact two-factor theory can influence policy development in Tennessee.

Ability to Seek Relevant Training and Helpful Resources

Parenting skills and resourcing abilities are not intuitive alone. Ahn et al. (2017) concluded that increasing the quality of foster parent training with practical parenting skills is an important way to influence foster parent self-efficacy (p. 479). Professional

data and researchers indicate that parenting skills are subject to training experience. Koh et al. (2014) found 83% of failed placements are due to youth behavior challenges (p. 43). The interview data and the literature review agree that foster parent training impacts retention. While training is important, successful foster parents seek training relevant to their situation and can identify resources helpful in the fostering situation. Foster parents reported that resources such as policy, finances, therapy, and medical services, to name a few, helped improve their fostering situation. Foster parents also listed social connections and emotional support as critical influences on their success and retention. More than one foster parent identified their spirituality as a helpful resource because it provides the strength needed to meet the needs of the foster child. The literature review and the interview data support my finding that foster parent retention may be influenced by a foster parent's ability to seek relevant training and helpful resources. The theoretical framework for this study can be implemented by policymakers in Tennessee to collect data specific to foster parent training needs and resources relevant to foster parent retention.

Ability to Employ Parenting Tips That Create Success

In the literature review and foster parent interviews, the data linked foster parent parenting tips to foster parent success. First, McKeough et al. (2017) found that foster parents who are confident in parenting skills are more capable of meeting the needs of foster youth, influencing the foster parent's ability to be successful. Ahn et al. (2017) emphasized that parenting tips must be practical and current to the foster parent's situation to be helpful. Foster parents in this study agreed that foster parenting tips are

one of the most central features of foster parent success. FP8 said, "There is no way you can do this without training." Foster parents are exposed to parenting tips through training. Foster parents agree that training and parenting tips should be an ongoing experience. The research data extend the knowledge of parenting tips for foster parents providing services in Tennessee because the tips are current and help foster parents experience success.

From the interview data, I recognized the following parenting tips for foster parents: (a) a structured but flexible routine, (b) an involved foster parent to foster children relationship, (c) predictable and diverse discipline techniques, (d) consistent expectations, (e) regular family meetings to facilitate communication, and (f) a daily chore schedule. Foster parent success is key in accommodating foster children's needs because it may increase the number of foster homes in Tennessee. Foster parents who stay current with foster parenting tips may be more likely to experience success in the foster parent–foster child dynamic and with the foster parent's fostering situation. Policymakers in Tennessee should capitalize these findings and develop systems to measure effective foster parenting tips and develop policy that encourages dissemination of successful parenting tips to encourage retention.

Being an Emotionally Invested Foster Parent

During data analysis, I found that both the data from the literature review and foster parent interviews strongly suggest that foster parents who experience emotional connectedness between themselves and the foster child are likely to experience success and increase tenure through foster parent satisfaction. Geiger et al. (2013) noted that

foster parent emotional connectedness impacts foster parent retention. The foster parent

interview data confirm that foster success is linked to emotional connectedness. For

example, FP5 shared the following:

> You are physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally involved. You are
>
> involved 100% with the youth you are working with. Our mind, body, soul, and
>
> spirit are connected to at-risk youth. You cannot subtract any from the list and be
>
> able to minister to the youth, guide the youth, or lead them in a better way. You
>
> minister to them as you would minister to your biological child. If you are not
>
> fully involved, it will not do for you or for the foster child what it needs to do.

Foster parents shared multiple examples of success influenced by their emotional

connection to foster parents. Because foster parents are emotionally connected, foster

parents must have emotional support. Whenan et al. (2009) and Madden et al. (2016)

stressed the importance of providing emotional rest for foster parents to increase foster

parent retention. Koh et al. (2014) suggested the primary way to support foster parents

with emotional stress is to assist foster parents with making healthy emotional

connections with others. More research can be done to better explain this connection;

however, when recruiting foster parents and connecting foster parents and foster children,

the foster parent's emotional ability to connect to the foster child should be assessed.

After reviewing archival data in Tennessee, I did not find any protocols encouraging

workers to assess foster parents' emotional ability to connect with foster children.

Policymakers in Tennessee can do more to assess the foster parent's ability to connect to

foster children by collecting data and developing policy that impact retention using the theoretical framework of this study.

Meaningful Foster Parent-to-Foster Child Relationship

The interview data supported findings from the literature review explaining that foster parents who have a meaningful relationship with the foster child experience tenure and success. McKeough et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of foster parenting skills on the foster parent-child relationship, urging professionals to focus foster parent training on parenting skills and connection. The interview data provided specific insight into the relationship between the foster parent and the foster child. The literature review supported findings that correlated positive trends between meaningful relationships, placement stability, and fostered parent retention. To promote meaningful connections, foster parents should (a) win the trust of the foster child, (b) be transparent and genuine with foster children, (c) make foster children feel welcome just like you would your own family, (d) allow an open platform for foster children to talk to foster parents, and (e) be consistent and have reasonable expectations of the foster parent-child relationship. A meaningful foster parent-child relationship may increase foster parent retention. Foster care leaders and Tennessee policymakers need to do more to develop policy in Tennessee by using the framework of this study to connect data to policy change to impact retention. Tennessee should continually collect data from foster parents to use as a source to influence policy that foster positive foster child and foster parent connections to increase foster parent retention.

Provision of Prompt and Updated Resources

Foster parent support is a broad topic that significantly influences foster parent retention. Foster parent support and foster parent retention are connected. Findings suggest that foster parenting resources and connection to resources directly influence foster parent retention (Chambers et al., 2017; Daniel, 2011; Geiger et al., 2017). One foster parent said, "if you cannot support the foster parent, they will not be successful." The literature review and the interview data described support as teamwork, emotional competency, financial support, and support from policy. There were few references explaining how policy supports foster parents; however, it is understood that laws and policy influence foster parent retention and support. As aforementioned, the interview data that describe financial support divert from the literature review. However, both interview data and the literature review agree on the influence and necessity of emotional support and competency. Koh et al. (2014) and Geiger et al. (2013) agreed that foster parents are more capable of managing emotional stress when they express healthy feelings of connectedness with family members, friends, professionals, and foster youth. Multiple sets of interview data reference the influence of teamwork and unity. While the literature review described this influence as connectedness, the participants described this influence as teamwork and unity. The concepts are the same. Foster parents need emotional support from their spouse, their community, the professional community, and the legal system.

Foster parents also need support in understanding the elements of emotional competency in the context of their situation. Chambers et al. (2017) and Geiger et al.

(2013) explained that emotional support is the physical availability of the case worker, establishment of practical support, positive words of encouragement, and any healthy expression of care from the case worker to the foster parent. Agency policy, practice, and culture must include factions that help foster parents. Foster parents need help with training, meeting the needs of foster youth, and feeling unified with the team. The theoretical framework of this study can be used to continually collect data to identify specific foster parenting resources that may influence foster parent retention. In the final section, I relate training concepts from the literature review and interview data.

Ability to Access Relevant Training and Instruction

I discovered a link in the foster parent interview data and the literature review between foster parent success and foster parent training. I found both the literature review and foster parent interviews emphasized that training alone does not increase success. Training must be relevant to the foster parent's situation. The foster parent's responsibility is to seek relevant training, and creating opportunities for relevant training experiences is the burden of policymakers. The interview data and the literature review agree that policymakers can do more to improve the training material and create more available training experiences for foster parents. Foster parent interview data expanded the knowledge of foster parent training needs by suggesting the following: (a) foster parents need more training in Tennessee to expand the foster parent's ability to connect with the child's biological family, (b) foster parents need a coach to help the foster parents apply the knowledge on an ongoing basis, (c) foster parents need more practical trauma information training, (d) foster parents need more individualized one-on-one

training experiences, (e) foster parents need more hands-on training experiences, (f)

foster parents need more training on self-regulation and emotional regulation, and (g)

foster parents need more training to help them deal with behavior management.

The needs in Tennessee are similar to those identified in the literature review.

Brown et al. (2014) specifically identified a link between relevant training topics and

foster parent success/retention. The burden of identifying relevant training topics is on

policymakers in Tennessee. Policymakers may identify relevant training topics by

improving and increasing foster parent research data in Tennessee, assessing the needs of

foster parents, and interpreting foster parent experiences through the theoretical

framework of this study.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations listed in Chapter 1 are consistent with the limitations that were

identified in earlier qualitative studies on this subject. The limitations include (a)

geographical location of the study, (b) the limitation of 10-15 participants, (c) data

collection tools, and (d) research dependability. Limitations are described as influencers

on a research project that are beyond the researcher's control (Rudestam & Newton,

2015). While this study specifically focused on the State of Tennessee, the limited

number of participants prevents the findings from being applied to Tennessee foster

parents universally. However, data saturation was achieved at 10 participants, as seven

foster parents reported compassion for foster children as a primary influence on their

decision to provide foster parenting services. While every study must end, more foster

parent participants may have helped the data to be applied universally to foster parents.

Out of 42 foster parents invited to participate in the study, only 10 agreed to participate. While the data collection was vetted by the professionals at Walden University, an evidence-based data collection tool or peer-reviewed data collection tool may have increased the reliability of the data generated from the data collection tool. Lastly, researcher dependability can be a barrier to a qualitative study's trustworthiness. To improve dependability, I generated data using data triangulation techniques by identifying at least three resources for data. Then, I synthesized the data using the three sources. I integrated data triangulation techniques by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews, reviewing archival data, and creating field notes.

Recommendations

This generic qualitative study aimed to explore the retention of long-term foster parents who are willing to parent at-risk adolescents in Tennessee. I conducted the study to inform public policy by exploring the retention of long-term foster parents willing to parent at-risk youth ages 13-17. I employed generic qualitative inquiry techniques. I utilized the theoretical frameworks of Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 2017) and PFT (Weible & Sabatier, 2018). The interview data, the literature review, and the theoretical framework collectively impacted the findings. The literature review gave both a historical and global type of validity to some of the data. For example, the literature review and the interview data supported the correlation between foster parent training and success. The literature review guided the analysis of this study because of the rich set of data and trends among research studies and foster parents. For example,

trends such as parenting styles, foster parent empathy, parenting tips, support, communication, and training.

Lastly, the literature review impacted the recommendations for this study. In the literature review, the studies offered suggestions for future research and studies. Those suggestions were used to gain insight into foster parent trends that may impact retention. For example, Orem et al., (2017) suggested more research be conducted to explain how social support impact foster parent retention. The recommendation was used as a catalyst to collect data to explain foster parent retention and connection or social support. After reflecting on the findings from this study, I identified the following areas for future research:

1. Explore trends between foster parent compassion, foster child satisfaction, and foster parent retention.

2. Identify and correlate foster parent training curriculum and foster parent retention.

3. Expand the catalog of foster parent parenting tips and correlate parenting tips to foster parent success.

4. Develop assessments to screen a foster parent's potential to emotionally connect with a foster child.

5. Research to better explain what a meaningful relationship means to foster parents and children.

6. Using policy feedback theory, develop a protocol to assess foster parent training needs that include scheduled intervals of data collection.

Foster care policy influences people who change and adapt as their environment changes. If policymakers do not have routine protocols to assess the effectiveness of their policies' effectiveness in promoting foster care stakeholders' goals, the policies will be ineffective. Ongoing research is needed to promote the growth of foster care policy and ongoing improvement of the quality of foster care services.

Implications

Foster parents are critical to improving the child welfare situation in the United States. The number of children in foster care is on the rise. With a crowded foster care system in Tennessee, Tennessee must retain and increase the number of foster parents willing to parent at-risk youth. Retaining foster parents begins with collecting information at the grassroots level to make positive changes. PFT (Weible & Sabatier, 2018) provides a framework to explore how policies influence policy stakeholders and identify the trajectory of policy development. Two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 2017) allows organizations to identify protocols to improve employee retention and satisfaction. Together, PFT and two-factor theory can provide a revolutionary tool for policymakers in Tennessee to develop streamlined policies to improve the quality of foster care services by increasing foster parent satisfaction and retention.

I collected data to explain the retention of long-term foster parents in Tennessee who provide services to at-risk youth. Based on the findings from this study, the impact of shaping policy to improve foster parent retention is vital to improving the foster care situation in Tennessee. If policy is focused on (a) foster parent compassion, (b) the ability of the foster parent to seek relevant training and helpful resources, (c) employing

parenting tips that create success, (d) being emotionally invested, (e) having a meaningful foster parent to foster child relationships, (f) making updated resources available to foster parents, and (g) making relevant training available to foster parents, then foster parent retention may increase in Tennessee.

Increasing foster parent retention is a foundational step to improving the foster care situation in Tennessee. If foster parent retention increases, the total number of available foster homes may increase. If placement options increase, foster care workers can be more selective when approving foster parents to serve. Foster parents can be better prepared to show compassion, seek training, and employ parenting tips. The training experience may include foster parent coaches and more one-on-one training experience. Foster parent recruiters can screen for individuals who are capable of being emotionally invested. Being selective with placements will allow workers to connect foster children with foster parents who have similar likes, interests, and cultural values. Improving the foster parent/foster child dynamic will likely improve the overall health of foster parents, foster children, and foster care workers.

Conclusions

There are over 400,000 children in foster care in the United States, which is close to the entire population of Knoxville, TN, and Chattanooga, TN, combined. Foster children are among the most vulnerable population in the United States and need a high-quality service to reduce system trauma and increase resiliency. My own experience as an at-risk youth drove my passion for this study. While I did not have a foster parent or a foster care case worker, my grandmother Josephine Amos served in that role. At the age

of 13, she provided me with a life-changing experience. She gave me a home, a warm connection, and instruction to live a healthy, independent life. I believe the answer to improving the foster care experience for foster youth, foster parents, and case workers is to shape policy to increase the retention of high-quality foster parents.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

M. Amos Interview Protocol

Opening

Thank you for participating today (shake hands and offer water or soda). My name is Marvin Amos, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am a Ph.D. student in the School of Public Policy and Administration. I am interested in increasing the quality of foster care services by contributing information to child welfare policymakers. Today, I will use part of your story to help inform policy that affects the retention of high-quality foster parents. The title of my dissertation is, Explaining the retention of foster parents who parent at-risk youth in Tennessee. My two research questions are as follows. First, how do foster parents who parent at-risk youth experience retention? Second, how can foster parent experiences shape Tennessee policy to promote foster parent retention more effectively?
My schedule is open, and I am following your lead on the direction of the interview. This is a semi-structured interview and will take between 45 and 90 minutes.

Before we get started, I would like to confirm that I received the informed consent document, request your permission to audio record the interview, and complete a verbal COVID-19 risk screening. First, I will share my COVID-19 risk status. You can stop the recorder at any time. The recording will help me document your responses accurately. All of your responses are confidential. There are some exceptions to confidentially under the law. I am required to report child abuse/neglect or elder abuse/neglect to authorities. If you report that someone is in a life-threatening condition, is suicidal, or is homicidal, I have to provide a referral to authorities. Any questions so far? Great.

Lastly, I reviewed the informed consent document and confirmed that I have your permission to include your interview in my work. Again, your information is confidential, and your personal identifying information will not be listed in my study. Are you ready to begin? Okay, let's get started.

II. Body

1   Why did you decide to become a foster parent?

2   What can you tell me about your interest in working with at-risk youth?

3   What are the circumstances surrounding your decision to foster adolescents?

4   Tell me more about your experience as a foster parent. What emotions are involved?

5   Since becoming a foster parent, tell me about a typical day – what works?

6   What is the most difficult part of making a foster care placement work? Think

back to your training; how does it help prepare you to work with at-risk youth?

7   What part of your foster parenting experience is going well?

We are halfway through the interview questions. How are you doing?

8   Tell me about your experience managing your relationship with at-risk youth?

9   What is the most important thing you are doing to make the relationship with at-risk youth work?

10   What have you noticed about other adults in charge of the youth's goals?

11   What stands out to you about the influence of other workers on your role?

12   Tell me about your relationship with your community and the foster care workers.

13   What support or resource do you think would help you keep adolescents in your

home throughout their foster care experience?

14   Based on your experience, what do foster parents need to be a success?

15   Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

III. Closing

Mr./Mrs. (Insert Name), it has been a pleasure hearing about your story. I appreciate the

time you gave to this interview. I look forward to sharing a copy of the final study's

abstract with you. If I have any questions, can I contact you?

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter to Foster Parents

Dear Foster Parent

First, on behalf of Tennessee's citizens and child welfare workers, thank you for being a foster parent! You are highly valued. Together, you help care for over 8,000 children in foster care in Tennessee. I also want to thank you for considering participating in my study. I am conducting this study for my dissertation at Walden University. Foster parents who participate in my study will participate in an interview that will help generate data. To increase foster parent retention, I aim to provide data and recommendations to child welfare stakeholders and policymakers in Tennessee. Essentially, what keeps foster parents providing services in Tennessee?

I will provide you with the final study's abstract. By participating, you could increase the quality of the foster parenting experience and the quality of the foster care experience for youth.

Thank you for considering this request, and I look forward to hearing back from you soon. You can contact me at the information provided below.

Sincerely,

M. Amos

Marvin Amos

███████

Appendix C: Confirmation Letter to Foster Parents

Dear Foster Parent Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study that may help improve foster parent retention in Tennessee. With your help, we may be able to create helpful recommendations for policymakers in Tennessee to create positive changes to improve the foster parenting experience.

I will contact you in the next two weeks to schedule the interview. What times work for you? Please see the interview questions and a copy of informed consent provided in your envelope. Please sign and return the informed consent document via email or postage mail. If you cannot return the signed copy of informed consent, I will obtain your signature on the day of the interview. The interview will last about 90 minutes. After the interview, I will continue the process of the research study. After completing my study, I will provide you with an electronic copy so you can see how your participation helped to influence the data and recommendations.

If you have any questions between now and when I schedule the interview, please contact me at the information provided below.

Sincerely,

Marvin Amos

Appendix D: Participant Prescreening Questionnaire

(1) Have you been a licensed foster parent in the last ten years?

(2) Did you or do you provide foster parenting services to at-risk youth?

(3) Do you work under or do you work for the researcher?

(4) Are you willing to provide 90 minutes for the interview?

Appendix E: Foster Care Director

Dear Foster Care Director,

Thank you for serving foster youth in Tennessee! I am completing a study to increase foster parent retention in Tennessee and need foster parent participants. I believe foster youth need a quality care experience to help them heal, prepare them for permanency, and to help them prepare for their future as a young adult. I am collecting data through semi-structured interviews that take about 90 minutes. The interviews can be completed in person at a public location or virtually. I am contacting you in hopes that you will recommend foster parent participants. I need 10 – 15 participants for the study. Below is a description of my study and the problem in Tennessee.

Federal legislation with the Family First Prevention Service Act (FFPSA) of 2017 requires Tennessee and other states to decrease the utilization of congregate care services, increase recruitment and retention strategies, and increase prevention services. Tennessee does not have enough available foster homes. Increasing the number of foster homes is necessary for Tennessee to comply with FFPSA. At-risk youth ages 13 -18 are among the most difficult to place in a family-based setting. Using Sabatier and Weible's (2018) perspective of policy feedback theory and Herzberg's two-factor theory on employee satisfaction and motivation, this qualitative case study aims to explain the retention of long-term foster parents who parent at-risk youth in Tennessee by exploring perceptions of foster parent retention. Data will be collected using semi-structured 90-minute interviews, field notes, and policy literature. The following two research questions guide the study. First, how do foster parents who parent at-risk youth experience retention? Second, how can foster parent experiences shape Tennessee policy to promote foster parent retention more effectively? The data will be used to inform child-welfare stakeholders in Tennessee. The findings may equip child welfare stakeholders in Tennessee to produce positive social change by informing policymakers so they can revise Tennessee policy in a way that may increase foster parent retention in Tennessee. An increase in foster parent retention will increase the overall health of at-risk foster youth in Tennessee by improving the youth's placement experience in foster care.

I look forward to hearing back from you soon. I will follow up with you in one week to see if you will partner with me on this journey to improve the foster parent experience in Tennessee. If you agree to partner with me, Walden University requires a letter of cooperation to be signed.

Sincerely, Marvin Amos

Appendix F: Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a study to increase the retention rate of foster parents in Tennessee. The researcher is inviting foster parents with at least two years of experience parenting adolescent foster youth to participate in the study. This form is part of an "informed consent" process to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to participate. You can sign and return the form to me before the interview. If you cannot return the form before your interview, I will obtain your signature on the day of the interview.

This study is conducted by a researcher named Marvin Amos, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. I am conducting this study for my Walden dissertation.

Background Information:

This qualitative case study aims to explore the retention of long-term foster parents who parent at-risk youth in Tennessee by exploring perceptions of foster parent retention in Tennessee. The interview will be audio recorded.

Procedures:

1. Participate in the interview (up to 90 minutes).
2. Participate in reviewing the transcript from the interview to make sure it is correct and send the researcher any updates by phone or email (40 minutes).

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. Compensation is not provided to participants. So everyone involved will respect your decision to join or not. The researcher will treat you the same whether or not you join the study. If you join now, you can still change your mind later and withdraw. The researcher is seeking 10 – 15 volunteers for the study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study could involve some risk of the minor discomforts encountered in daily life, such as minor stress when recalling previous life experiences. This study would pose minimal risk to your well-being with the protections in place.

This study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. This study aims to benefit society by increasing the quality of service provided to adolescents in foster care.

Privacy:

The researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Be aware that this researcher's professional role as a child welfare professional requires the researcher to be a mandated reporter of child abuse or neglect. The researcher will not use your personal information outside this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the researcher would be required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing; this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be kept for a period of at least five years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You can ask questions of the researcher by phone or email at ████████████ and ██████████████████████. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at ███████████ Walden University's approval number and expiration date will be added here when obtained.

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask the researcher or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact info above.

Obtaining Your Consent:

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by replying to this email or signing the attached form and returning it ng to the researcher via email or the provided mailing address.

Printed Name of Participant: _____

Date of consent: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Appendix G: Sample Letter of Cooperation from a Research Partner

Community Research Partner Name
Contact Information
Date
Dear Marvin Amos,
Based on my review of your research proposal, I permit you to conduct the study entitled
Exploring the retention of foster parents who parent at-risk youth in Tennessee within the
Insert Name of Community Partner. As part of this study, I authorize you to complete in-
person interviews in a public setting or virtual interviews with foster parents we refer to
you for your study. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their discretion.
Compensation is not permitted.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: providing you with a list
of foster parents we recommend for your study. Foster parents in bad standing with the
agency or who frequently disrupt at-risk youth will not be included. All of the
recommended foster parents have experience working with at-risk youth ages 13 -18. We
reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project
report that is published in Proquest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan
complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be
provided to anyone outside the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission
from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,
Authorization Official
Contact Information

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid
as a written signature as both parties agree to conduct the transaction electronically. The
Uniform Electronic Transactions Act regulates electronic signatures. Electronic
signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email or (b) copied
on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the
person's typed name, email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University
staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected
source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).