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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Joey Gardner

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Understanding Social Workers' Knowledge of Foster Care Drift

by

Joey J. Gardner, Jr.

MSW, University of Southern California, 2013

BA, University of Arkansas, 2012

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Social Work

Walden University

November 2018

Abstract

Foster care drift is the extended stay in foster care without attaining family reunification or permanency with another placement. When foster care youth experience foster care drift, they face the possibility of aging out of the foster care system. Interventions and policies have been implemented to aid family service workers during the process of permanency planning; however, a great number of foster care youth remain in care. This study explored the perceptions of social work professionals regarding foster care drift regarding issues and challenges that social workers engaged in foster care placement face regarding foster care drift. The ecological system theory provided the foundation for understanding the connection of social workers and the external systems surrounding them. An action research design was used to carry out this study. A focus group with family service workers in the southeastern region of the United States was conducted. Seven participants discussed foster care drift and developed possible solutions. Key findings from the study show 3 main themes: ineffective communication, unproductive parent education classes, and unhelpful allocation of agency funding. Possible solutions to decrease foster care drift include improving communication among workers and other agencies, improving parent education courses to include an independent living skills component, and allocating monetary resources to develop programs specific for foster care youth and their families. The findings of this study might effect social change by supporting a shift in focus of foster care services from out-of-home interventions to preventative services to promote family stability.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study and Literature Review

In the state of Arkansas, nearly 5,000 children are experiencing out-of-home placement due to neglect, physical abuse, or sexual abuse (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016). Approximately 18% of those individuals experience foster care drift until aging out of care (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016). The following study utilized an action-research method to gain an understanding of foster care drift and permanency in the southeastern region of the United States. I explored the history and current policies of the child welfare system on a national and local level to provide insight into the social problem known as foster care drift. Section 1 will continue as follows: First, I provide a problem statement to frame knowledge on the concept of out-of-home placement, foster drift, and permanency outcomes for foster youth. Afterward, I provide the purpose statement and research question. Third, I discuss the nature of the doctoral project. Next, regarding the significance of the study, I provide information on how the capstone project relates to current social work practice. Following the significance of the study is the theoretical/conceptual framework. Then I provide a review of the professional and academic literature to synthesize the most recent research on the topic of out-of-home placement and foster care drift. The section concludes with a summary.

Out-of-home placement, or foster care, is an intervention used by the child welfare system to address child maltreatment (Ryan, Perron, Moore, Victor, & Evangelist, 2016). Child maltreatment is the sexual abuse, physical abuse, or neglect of individuals under the age of 18 by a legal guardian (Ryan et al., 2016). The national child welfare agency that manages foster care placements is the Division of Children and

Family Services, a department of the Arkansas Department of Human Services. The goal of the Division of Children and Family Services is to seek family reunification. However, not all foster youth are reunified with their family (Ryan et al., 2016). To regain custody, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 mandates that guardians complete the requirements developed under the child welfare system within a time frame of 12 to 18 months with the assistance of the Division of Children and Family Services (Whitt-Woosley & Sprang, 2014). If foster youth guardians are not able to complete their state requirements to regain custody, the government terminates their parental rights and takes custody of the individual to seek another permanent home (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

In the state of Arkansas, a child can come into foster care by means of referral from anyone in the community, school system, hospital, or justice system (Arkansas Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2017). After a call is made to report the claim of abuse or neglect, the Division of Children and Family Services rates the claim by priority based on the severity of the case (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2017). If the claim is found to be severe or priority 1, the investigator will go out to the home to examine the situation, family, and home environment. On the other hand, if the claim is rated as a priority 2-3, the differential response worker will work with the family to prevent the child from being removed from the home. After the investigator finishes their investigation, a decision is made to either allow the child stay in the home or to remove the child and place the child in a 72-hour hold (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2017). During the 72-hour hold period, the investigator attempts to gathered

information from the family to see if a provisional placement is possible to keep the child from going into a foster home or contract placement. The week after the child is removed from the home, the family attends court to determine if the child will remain in foster care or be reunified with their family. If the judge decides to keep the child in foster care, the family service worker will start the permanency planning process (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2017). The family service worker then meets with the guardian and reviews the steps and criteria for reunification.

Foster care drift is defined as the extended stay in foster care of a child without attaining family reunification or permanent placement after parental rights are terminated (Freitas, Freitas, Boumil, & 2014). When foster youth experience multiple placements without achieving permanency during the out-of-home placement process, they experience foster drift and face the possibility of aging out of care (Curry & Abrams, 2015). Individuals who age out of care are known as transitional age youth (Curry & Abrams, 2015). Transitional-age youth are individuals who range between the ages of 18 and 21 who age out of foster care (Curry & Abrams, 2015). Placing children in foster care temporarily disrupts the family unit which can have a long-term impact on individuals into adulthood (James, 2004). Permanency in foster care refers to the permanent placement of foster youth in a home (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010). As a family service worker, social workers partake in the process of permanency planning to reunite foster care youth with their family or help foster care youth obtain a permanent placement. The role of the family service workers can be broken down into two units. A supervisor may evaluate a worker's strengths to assign them to cases where

they are the strongest such as foster care cases or supportive service cases. In the foster care case role the family service worker completes the following duties: attends court cases, completes case plans, reviews court reports, makes sure services/resources are put into place, schedules visitations, schedules medical appointments, and carries out other duties such as transportation. In a supportive service case role, workers have responsibilities that include monitoring the family's progress during the out-of-home placement process. These are the cases when parental rights have not been terminated, and a plan has been developed for reunification. These cases normally stay open no longer than 6 months. At times, family service workers may be appointed additional duties or roles such as resource worker, adoption specialist, differential response, and community enrichment specialist.

Permanency planning is the process by which the Division of Children and Family Services workers attempt to find permanent placement for foster youth either with the individual's biological family or an adoptive family (Miller, Fein, Bishop, Stilwell, & Murray, 1984; Jullen-Chinn & Lietz, 2016). The Adoption and Safe Family Act of 1997 was developed as an effort to counter foster care drift and promote family reunification; however, it has created issues surrounding parental rights termination and social work practice (Whitt-Woosley & Sprang, 2014). The Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 serves as a guideline for judges and organizations to assist families with reunification. It is up to the judge to interpret and carry out the law written in the policy. Many judges are hesitant to be so strict given the limited number of resources available in each state; however, if a family is unable to complete the requirements given by the judge

and Division of Children and Family Services, parental rights are terminated. Under the Adoption and Safe Family Act, the phrase long-term foster care was replaced with another planned permanent living arrangement (Pecora, Whittaker, Maluccio, Barth, & Plotnick, 2000).

Another planned permanent living arrangement is the alternate living situation when reunification, relative placement, adoption, or other legal guardianship has been ruled out (Pecora et al., 2000). The Casey Family Program conducted the Multi-Site Accelerated Permanency Project to analyze another planned permanent living arrangement across four states. The program was implemented with youth who were 12 and older. The project's focus was to increase the legal permanency rates of foster youth using the intervention permanency roundtables. Permanency roundtables are meetings that focus on legal permanency involving internal and external experts (Pecora et al., 2000). The findings from this project after a year showed that only 8.5% of individuals obtained permanency, 61.6% were still in care, 27% transitioned out of care, and 2.9% ran away (Pecora et al., 2000). The study concluded that although an intensive intervention was taken using a holistic approach, foster youth continued to remain in care (Pecora et al., 2000).

Multiple factors could explain the process of foster drift such as lack of foster care placements, foster care youth maladaptive behaviors, or family service workers' inability to provide adequate services because of overbearing caseloads. Agencies have attempted to come together to provide services in a holistic approach to solving these needs; however, due to the complex nature of the systems surrounding foster care youth, foster

care drift has continued to remain a problem (Pecora et al., 2000). This problem was revealed by the failure of a holistic permanency planning roundtable intervention in the Multi-Site Accelerated Permanency Project study (Pecora et al., 2000). One theory that provided an insight into the failure of holistic interventions is the ecological system theory (Freitas et al., 2014). Bronfenbrenner developed the ecology system theory to explain how individuals develop and succeed through interactions with external forces (as cited in Freitas et al., 2014). The ecological theory provides the foundation for understanding the connection between foster youth and the external systems surrounding them. Holistic interventions attempt to bring these systems together to provide appropriate services for foster care youth to achieve permanency, but there appear to be gaps in services.

Multiple influences impact the lives of foster youth who experience out-of-home placement and foster drift. Often, children in foster care experience difficulties achieving permanency due to increases in maladaptive behaviors, lack of biological family involvement in the reunification process, or lack of support from administrative agencies (Shea, 2015). Interventions and policies have been implemented to aid family service workers during the process of permanency planning; however, a significant number of foster care youth remain in care.

The research question of this capstone project centered on the issues and challenges that social workers engaged in foster care placement face regarding foster care drift. I used an action-research methodology to collect data and gain an understanding of foster care drift. Interventions and policy changes developed because of this information

may have a positive social change by decreasing the number of youth experiencing foster care drift and aging out of care.

Problem Statement

One of the statutes designed to guide policy by the child welfare system was the enactment of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. The policy reevaluated the concept of foster care as the temporary treatment for individuals and pushed for family involvement and permanency (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010). A few years later, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 was developed to create guidelines and regulations for the agency to promote permanency.

Although policies and actions have been implemented on the national level to decrease the number of individuals in out-of-home placement, there appears to be a significant number of individuals entering foster care at a young age and experiencing placement instability (Chor, 2013). The social work practice problem addressed in this project centers on social workers' inability to find permanency placement for foster youth in the state of Arkansas.

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) of 2014 reported that the total number of children in foster care nationally was 415,129 (Pecora et al., 2000). Although 238,230 of those individuals exited care either through reunification or adoption, there was an increase of 264,746 individuals who entered care that same year. About 60,898 of those individual's parental rights were terminated (Pecora et al., 2000). The number of children in foster care has continued to grow, and almost one-fourth of those individuals remain in care without permanent placement.

In 2016, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson described the foster care system as being in a crisis (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016). In May 2016, there were 4,900 children in the foster care system in the state of Arkansas (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016). In a three-month time span, the number of youth in foster care grew to 5,033 in August 2016 (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016). Foster care workers in Arkansas reported that the recruitment of foster homes decreased. There were only 3,384 beds available, which created a shortage of about 1,600 open beds for children in care (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016). On average, about 18% of youth in foster care were in foster care more than 24 months and experienced multiple placements (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016). According to Khoo and Skoog (2014), instability in placement is frequent and occurs in 20% to 40% of placements. Every year, about 250 teens between the ages of 18 and 21 age out of foster care without permanent placement even with the implementation of independent living programs (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016).

Foster youth, biological families, foster families, and social workers often struggle with having a lack of resources to support this vulnerable population (Jee, Conn, Toth, Szilagyi, & Chin, 2014). It is often difficult for social workers to provide adequate care to foster youth due to the disruption in services that accompanies foster care placement. For instance, there are approximately 940 family service workers in the state who handle the permanency planning of these youth (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016). On average, in the state of Arkansas, family service workers typically hold a caseload of about 30 foster care youth. The standard recommended by the Child

Welfare League of America is 15 (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016). In this action research project I sought to understand the issues and challenges that social workers face regarding foster care drift and permanency in the southeastern region of the United States.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

In this study I explored the social work profession and permanency in foster care. The research question of this capstone project was as follows:

> RQ: What are the issues and challenges that social workers engaged in foster care placement face regarding foster care drift?.

An action research design was used to carry out this study. According to Stanfield (2000), action research is a methodology that minimizes the threat of personal bias in data. I cocreated meaning of the social problem with the volunteers in a focus group (Stanfield, 2000).

The social problem for this study was out-of-home placement. Out-of-home placement is the period of stay that individuals experience in foster care once they enter the system. Out-of-home placement occurs when individuals are taken out of their home and placed in a temporary living situation until they are reunified with their family (Pecora et al., 2000). Foster care drift is the prolonged period of stay in foster care without receiving permanent placement (Pecora et al., 2000). Once children enter care, parents struggle with completing the necessary guidelines to regain custody of their children, which leads to parental rights being terminated. When parental rights are terminated, children continue to remain in care without receiving permanent placement.

Policies stemming from statutes such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 were implemented to support individuals who experience out-of-home placement and their families; however, foster care drift continues to remain a problem. The key terms for this project are *child welfare, foster care, foster care drift, permanency planning, provisional care, reunification,* and *transitional age youth*. Definitions for the listed terms can be found in the definition section.

Data acquired from this capstone project provided knowledge to the social work profession to facilitate the planning and development of appropriate interventions to achieve permanency among foster care youth and their families in the southeastern region of the United States. The individuals who will benefit from this research will include foster youth and the social workers who partake in the permanency planning process. The research on social work practice and child welfare is needed to expand the knowledge of the social work profession in order to decrease foster care drift.

Nature of the Doctoral Project

This capstone doctoral project emphasized social workers' practice in the field of child welfare in the southeastern region of the United States. An action-research methodology takes a social-constructivist approach, which means that as researcher, I cocreated meaning of foster care drift with family service workers who provide permanency planning (see Bortoletto, 2017). To gather data and explore the topic, I held a focus group with individuals who experience the social problem daily. Focus group and interviews allowed me to explore ideas on why the social problem is occurring. Action research is focused on the everyday experience of individuals and the development of

living knowledge. When the volunteers have expressed their ideas of the social problem with the action researcher, they began to bridge the gap between research and the professional action of social work (Bortoletto, 2017). The individuals who experience the social problem daily are considered to be the experts in that field. Bortoletto (2017) suggest that local development includes individual and communitarian demands. Action research attempts to turn communication into action and decision-making after bringing awareness to individuals (Bortoletto, 2017). I conducted a focus group with the individuals in the community. During the focus group, members in the community discussed the social problem and developed possible solutions. The members of the community then attempted to put those ideas into action to change the social problem. This process is known as the action research spiral (Bortoletto, 2017). By bringing awareness of the social problem to the community, it was expected that individuals were able to develop ideas or solutions to fix the problem.

For this project, I used a focus group to explore possible issues that are influencing foster care drift. Foster care drift is the extended length of stay in foster care without adoption or reunification with the biological family (Pecora et al., 2000). A focus group allowed individuals in a community to come together to brainstorm and discuss possible solutions to the social problem. A focus group took place with family service workers who hold a social work degree on a bachelor or master's level at a local agency in the state of Arkansas. Challenges and issues that social workers face regarding permanency planning and foster care drift were explored in the focus group. The data collected from the focus group was analyzed and coded into themes so that foster care

drift can be further explored. The research question was focused on understanding the issues and challenges faced by social workers engaged in foster care placement regarding foster care drift.

Significance of the Study

The capstone project has the potential to make contributions to the advancement of social work practice and knowledge on permanency planning (micro level) by increasing the awareness of foster drift to permanency planning social workers in the southeastern region of the United States. Permanency planning social workers and other professionals have strived to understand the multiple factors that influence placement decisions, but decision-making surrounding this vulnerable population is often inconsistent or fails to the meet the needs of foster youth and their families (Bhatti-Sinclair & Sutcliffe, 2013). According to Curry and Abrams (2015), policy and practice decisions involving foster youth are key factors in creating a supportive environment for this population that promote permanency. For instance, policies mandated by one of the current national (macro level) statutes known as the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 have created issues with individual social work practice (micro level). The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 attempted to create shorter timelines for parental rights to be terminated to promote permanent placement. If a child is not reunited with their biological family in 12-15 months, parental rights were terminated so that the child could find permanent placement with another family rather than experience prolong periods in foster care. However, the enactment of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 created additional problems for permanency planning social workers. Permanency

planning social workers were already maintaining a large caseload but were now forced to find and allocate community resources for biological families in a quick period to promote reunification. Parental rights are being terminated faster, and children are continuing to enter and stay in foster care.

During the focus group, permanency planning social workers and I examined challenges surrounding permanency planning at one of the local Division of Children and Family Services agencies in the state of Arkansas. The goal of this study was to increase the awareness of foster drift to permanency planning social workers in the southeastern region of the United States. There is the potential of improving the social workers' and agency's permanency planning processes by discovering barriers and implementing new skills to increase best practice. Information obtained from this capstone project sheds light on unknown barriers that permanency planning social workers face in the southeastern region of the United States, which could promote social work practice (micro level practice), agency (mezzo level), and state/national (macro) policy amendments.

Social work practice on the micro level can be improved through the permanency planning process. Social workers could improve their practice to promote better communication with other local community agencies to increase the allocation of resources to biological and foster families. Permanency planning often involves connecting biological and foster families with local community resources to increase stability. If the changes made on the micro level of practice are positive, it can be expected that the agency (mezzo) would alter their policies to support the permanency

planning social workers. Although the study focuses on a regional location, the information from this study could shed additional information to promote future amendments to state or national laws impacting the work surrounding foster care youth.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's ecology system theory is based on the living and non-living network that makes up the ecosystem (as cited in Freitas et al., & 2014). Bronfenbrenner believed that individuals are the center of interacting systems that play an important role in personal development (as cited in Sabri, Hong, Campbell, & Cho, 2013). Individuals' systems are forever evolving and are developed during different stages of an individual's life cycle. When individuals enter foster care, their ecology system changes. There are multiple ways that an individual's ecology system can be defined; however, for this capstone project, the foster care ecology system was composed of the micro (social work practice), mezzo (agency), and macro (polices) (see Hong, Algood, Chiu, & Lee, 2011).

Individuals can influence and be impacted by their ecological systems. According to Fulcher and McGladdery (2011), regarding Bronfenbrenner's ecology theory, social workers need to include biological or foster families in the permanency planning process to promote successful developmental outcomes while decreasing individuals' maladaptive behaviors. Social work practice with individuals in foster care involves promoting the development of foster care youth for transition into adulthood. The ecological system theory provides the foundation for understanding the connection between social work practice and systems surrounding foster care youth. In this capstone research project, the ecological theory supported the exploration of foster care drift and

social workers' practice in the child welfare system. The focus of this project was understanding the social worker's knowledge of foster care drift and the social worker's role in foster youth achieving permanency. The ecological system theory guided the focus group questions by exploring the social worker's personal practice (micro), interactions with the agency (mezzo), and interactions with other local community agencies (macro).

Cumulative risk theory added to the ecological system theory for my exploration of how external forces or systems impact the foster youth. Cumulative risk theory helps me explore how the exposure to external stressors before entering foster care influences a child's ability to cope with current stressors when entering foster care, which promotes foster care drift (Andersen, 2015). Two models explain these risk factors. The Isle of Wight model identifies six possible stressors for a foster child that include: (a) the parent's marital status, (b) the family's socioeconomic status, (c) family size, (d) paternal criminal history, (e) parental mental health status, and (f) foster placement (Andersen, 2015). The second model, Rochester longitudinal study, identifies 10 similar risk factors that include (a) parental mental health, (b) parental anxiety, (c) parental beliefs on child development, (d) lack of positive parent and child relationship, (e) parental employment status, (f) low parental employment skill set, (g) minority status, (h) single parent, (i) traumatic events, and (j) family size (Andersen, 2015). The additional factors displayed in the Rochester study focus on the parent and child relationship. However, both models claim that risk factors result from the lack of community resources. The cumulative risk theory claims that child development depends on the number of risks that foster youth are

experiencing. Cumulative risk theory also attempts to explain how the relationship between exposure to risk and a child's placement course correlates. Foster youth from a low socioeconomic family have already been exposed to several risks. This exposure reduces their abilities to handle stressors that occur during placements and restricts their adjustment to the placement which promotes foster care drift.

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The goal of the social work profession is to assist societies in developing interventions to support vulnerable populations (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017). Child welfare is a field of practice in the social work profession whose practitioners aim to protect the vulnerable population of children and adolescents. In this area of practice, social workers support and protect youth from child maltreatment (NASW, 2017). One important intervention started in the child welfare system is foster care (Dulmus & Sowers, 2012). Although the goal is to seek family reunification, there are gaps in services that may prevent this outcome. When children are not able to reunite with their families, they remain in foster care for prolonged periods. The process of moving from one home to another in foster care without receiving permanent placement is known as foster care drift (Pecora et al., 2000).

The following section details the process and steps used in my search of the literature and a synthesis of the literature on the issue of foster care drift. The first section outlines the process of and steps for the literature review. The second section provides definitions surrounding the theme of foster care drift. The third section provides a historical background. Following that, I analyze current research to provide

information on policies, social workers' roles, and interventions influencing foster care drift. The fifth section highlights the limitations of the research. The last portion is a summary of the research obtained for the synthesis.

Process and Steps for Literature Review

I used the research obtained for this capstone project to create a synthesis to outline the issue of foster care drift. Academic journals and peer-reviewed articles were obtained through the Walden University academic library using the social work database SocINDEX and PsycINFO between March 2016 and August 2017. The literature presented in this synthesis comes from searches on disciplines such as social work and public policy. Some of the key terms used to search articles included: *foster youth, foster care drift, child welfare, foster care policies, permanency,* and *social work.* In cases of limited research, articles beyond the 6-year period supported the current literature on out-of-home placement and foster care drift. The articles beyond the 6-year time frame were peer-reviewed articles that supported the topic of foster drift and out-of-home placement. Although out of the time frame, the articles expressed the need for interventions to decrease the foster care population.

Definitions

The following terms used throughout this literature review are defined as follows:

Child welfare: Child welfare is a field of social work practice that develops interventions to make sure that children are safe (NASW, 2017). Child welfare services also provide families with support to make sure children have the proper resources to thrive (NASW, 2017).

Foster care: Foster care is the temporary placement of individuals in alternative living situations due to child maltreatment (Pecora et al., 2000).

Provisional care: Provisional care is a placement where a child can achieve residential stability in a familiar environment with a family member or known person. Provisional placements support reunification efforts, and the person with whom the child is placed participates in weekly visitations with parents (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016)

Foster care drift: Foster care drift is the prolonged period of stay in foster care without achieving permanent placement after parents lose parental rights (Pecora et al., 2000).

Permanency planning: Permanency planning is completed by Division of Children and Family Services workers to find a permanent living situation for individuals who enter foster care (Miller et al., 1984).

Reunification: Reunification occurs when children who are taken away from their families are reunited after temporary placement (Rycraft, 1994).

Transitional-age youth: Transitional age youth are the individuals who remain in care between the ages of 18 to 21 (Curry & Abrams, 2015).

Historical Context

The child welfare field of practice within social work began with a program created by Charles Loring Brace and the New York Children's Aid Society in the 1800s (Cook, 1995). Brace and the New York Children's Aid Society developed a program known as the Orphan Train Strategy to decrease the population of eastern states after

urbanization and industrialization. The program solved the issue of overcrowding; however, other issues involving the care of children started to surface. Children were often treated as indentured servants in their new placements and were forced to work to receive food, clothing, and shelter (Cook, 1995). Volunteers and charitable organizations developed interventions to assist children in finding appropriate placements. These interventions included background checks on potential foster parents and permanency planning (Cook, 1995). The additional training that these volunteers received eventually led to the development of the social work field of practice known as child welfare.

Foster care has been around since the 1800s; however, awareness of foster care drift did not occur until the 1950s (Doyle, 2007). Maas and Engler's research on permanency in 1959 created an awareness of the time that children spent in foster care without achieving permanency (as cited in Doyle 2007). After Maas and Engler published their research in a book titled *Children in Need of Parents,* the government felt it was necessary to reconceptualize the idea of foster care as a temporary service. In 1980, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act was developed to promote family involvement, prevention, assessment, planning, and permanency (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010). The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 required agencies to develop a reporting and tracking system to prevent children from floating around in care without receiving effective permanency planning.

In the late 1990s, the child welfare system shifted the focus from temporary placement to family reunification to keep children from entering foster care. Instead of focusing on foster care as the primary intervention for children and their families, the

child welfare system strove to keep families together (Rycraft, 1994). Family reunification became the primary objective of the child welfare system, which led to the enactment of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Whitt-Woosley & Sprang, 2014). Laws and regulations under the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 provide specific guidelines for agencies to seek permanency, improve agency services, and provide funding sources to support programs geared toward out-of-home placement. The Adoptions and Safe Families Act once again returned responsibility to the agency to promote community support for families to help them with reunification. Under the Adoptions and Safe Families Act, agencies helped parents complete the requirements to gain guardianship within a 12-month period. When parents were not able to complete the requirements developed by agencies, they lost custody of their children, ultimately perpetuating the cycle of foster care drift.

Foster care drift continues to remain a problem after the implementation of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Cross, Koh, Rolock, & Elen Manning, 2013). The government has consistently developed policies to decrease foster care drift; however, the problem persists 60 years later.

Review of Current Literature on Foster Care System

Approximately 2 million youth are subjects of child maltreatment investigations each year in the United States, and 1 million of those individuals are typically found to have been a victim (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). About 100,000 of those individuals are placed in the child welfare system (Doyle, 2007). The

goal of the child welfare system is family reunification. Family reunification does not always occur, and parental rights can be terminated if parents do not comply with state guidelines (Riley-Behringer & Cage 2014; Ryan et al., 2016). When parents lose their parental rights, children stay in the foster care system and have a higher risk of experiencing foster care drift (Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014).

Current State of Foster Care in Arkansas

In the state of Arkansas, the number of children removed from their homes from January 2015 to November 2016 grew by thirty-seven percent (Hardy, 2017). These children were removed from their homes and placed in foster care by the Division of Children and Family Services which is a child welfare division of the Arkansas Department of Human Services. In the state of Arkansas, there are approximately 400 family service workers including caseworkers and investigators. This number has continued to rise even in 2017. There were 3,811 children in foster care in December of 2014 (Hardy, 2017). In February 2017, the number of youth in foster care rose to 5,196 with about 721 of those cases being overdue and only 1,601 open foster homes to house these individuals (Hardy, 2017). At that time, the average caseload that Division of Children and Family Services workers in the state of Arkansas averaged around twenty-eight cases per worker (Hardy, 2017). The nationally recognized standard is of cases for workers to have is fifteen (Hardy, 2017). Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services workers removed about 5.3 children per thousand compared to the national standard of three (Hardy, 2017). Child welfare agency in Arkansas consistently records caseloads above the recommended standard in 63 of the state's 75 counties (Hardy, 2017).

Hot Spring County is averaging the highest at 79 cases per worker. Other counties where Division of Children and Family Services caseloads are excessively over the national standard include Cross (68), Dallas (51), Saline (53) and Sevier (55) (Arkansas Department of Children and Family Services, 2016).

Foster Drift

The profession of social work's goal is to assist societies in developing interventions to support vulnerable populations (NASW, 2017). Child welfare is a field of practice in the social work profession that aims to protect children and adolescents. In this area of practice, social workers support and protect youth from child maltreatment (NASW, 2017). One important intervention started in the child welfare system is foster care (Dulmus & Sowers, 2012). The current goal of foster care is to seek family reunification after a child is removed from the home due to child maltreatment. After youth are removed from their home, they are placed into a temporary home until they are reunified with their family, adopted by a foster family, or age out of care (Rock, Michelson, Thomson & Day, 2013). If families are unable to meet the regulations of the Division of Children and Family Services to achieve reunification, youth experience foster drift. Researchers define foster drift as the prolonged period in the child welfare system without obtaining permanent placement due to complexity developed through multiple placements (Freitas et al., 2014). Foster care drift is a component and extension of out-of-home placement (Freitas et al., 2014). Foster youth who move through care without achieving permanency often struggle with adapting to the multiple environments

that they may experience. These environments could include new homes with specific rules, new foster families, school environments, and social environments.

When foster youth experience foster care drift there is a greater risk of aging out of care without obtaining permanent placement (Leve, Harold, Chamberlain, Landsverk, Fisher, & Volstanis, 2012). The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (2013), conducted a longitudinal survey known as the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well Being (NSCAW) to observe the placement outcomes of foster youth. The NSCAW is a survey composed of 5,501 children aged 14 years or younger who had contact with the child welfare system within a 15-month period. The survey provides data on foster youth over a 59 to 96 month period. NSCAW found that after spending 12 to 18 months in foster care, foster youth percentage of obtaining experiencing foster drift increased (Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation, 2013). After 36 to 42 months in foster care, the chances of obtaining a permanent placement is low (Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation, 2013). Among all children who spent 36 or more months in foster care, 77% had foster care as their last known placement type (Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation, 2013).

Placing a child in foster care also has psychological, educational, medical, and economic consequences (Bhatti-Sinclair & Sutcliffe, 2013). Children in foster care experience trauma or crisis situations such as neglect, physical abuse, or sexual abuse. Experiencing such traumatic events and placement changes has the potential to create the need for mental health services due to the development of behavioral issues (Scozzaro & Janikowski, 2015). Foster youth may experience symptoms related to depression, social

phobias, panic disorders, anxiety disorders, and conduct disorders at two to four times the rate of the typical youth (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001). In one study, the rates of childhood mental health disorders increased 2.91 times in families with child abuse (Leve et al., 2012). Behavioral issues can be an effect of placement instability and foster drift (Eggersten, 2008; Garcia & Courtney, 2011; Leve et al., 2012).

Youth that enter the child welfare system become a member of an intertwined network that focuses on family reunification. Social workers are needed within this field of practice to assist foster youth and their families in accessing resources and social supports (Fulcher & McGladdery, 2011). The mission of the child welfare system focuses on family reunification. However, statistics have shown that a large amount of foster youth experience foster drift and eventually age out of care (Ryan et al., 2016, Riley-Behringer & Cage, 2014). The ecological system of foster youth contains multiple programs and agencies that have their agenda and mission which may make it difficult for social workers to determine the appropriate intervention during the permanency planning process (Gram et al., 2015). Leve, Harold, Chamberlain, Landsverk, Fisher, and Volstanis (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of eight evidence-based practice interventions for foster families. It was found that there are multiple interventions, services, and programs developed to aid foster care youth. However, there appears to be a disconnect in service delivery at the micro level of practice (Leve et al., 2012). The cycle of multiple placements and foster care drift makes it difficult for social workers to develop appropriate interventions to decrease the outcome of individuals floating in care (Leve et al., 2012). There is not a concrete answer on why foster drift occurs. However,

it has been found that mental health, lack of care-giver and foster youth connection, case management, and access to resources have played a factor (Leve et al., 2012). Because of out-of-home placement and foster drift, children have a higher percentage of aging out of care which could create potential problems during the transition into adulthood (Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation, 2013).

Characteristics of Children who Experience Foster Drift

Several studies have indicated characteristics of children who experience foster care drift, which includes age, race, gender, and special needs. In the state of Arkansas, of the children in foster care in 2015, forty-four percent had been in care longer than 12 months (Hardy, 2017). Two characteristics that appeared to influence if a child experienced foster care drift in Arkansas were race and gender. Kemp and Bodonyi (2002) conducted a longitudinal study to examine characteristics of children that correlate with the length of time to achieve permanency. A sample of 1,366 foster youth was examined in the state of Washington. Results showed that African American children were less likely to achieve permanency versus children of a Caucasian backgrounds. Children who were of Hispanic origin were more likely to be adopted, and children who were of biracial (African American and Hispanic) ethnicity were less likely to be adopted than by those of other ethnic backgrounds. In the state of Arkansas, sixty-three percent of the children were white, and nineteen percent were African American in 2015 (Hardy, 2017). At the end of the year, 567 children were available for adoption (Hardy, 2017). Of the available children for adoption, fifty-six percent were white, and twenty-two percent were black (Hardy, 2017). Although representing a small number in the foster care

system, African Americans appeared to have a more extended stay in the state of Arkansas and experience foster care drift.

Studies have also shown that male foster youth are more likely than females to experience delays in adoption (Avery & Freudlich, 2009). In the state of Arkansas, fifty-two percent were male, and forty-eight percent were female (Hardy, 2017). Before adolescence, boys are more likely than girls to be identified as having adjustment problems because they tend to have externalizing symptoms, such as aggression, whereas girls are more likely to have internalizing symptoms, such as depression and anxiety (Avery & Fredulich, 2009).

Aging Out

Individuals who experience foster care drift transition out of foster care between the ages of 18 and 21 without achieving permanent placement (Curry & Abrams, 2015). The youth who age out of foster care lose access to government resources they received as minors while in foster care which makes it difficult to thrive as independent adults (James, 2004). Foster youth become homeless at a higher rate than their peers who remain in their family's care. Reily (2003) conducted a qualitative study interviewing 100 youth that aged out of care for at least six months. Reily (2003) found that approximately 36% of individuals aging out of foster care experience some component of homelessness, incarceration, sexual assault, or victimization (Reilly, 2003). At least 22% of individuals exiting foster care without achieving permanency may have lived in at least four different places in an 18-month period (Kushel, Yen, Gee, & Courtney, 2007). Other studies have shown that when individuals experience foster drift and age out of

care without receiving permanent placement, the possibilities of becoming homeless and involvement in criminal activity increases (Curry & Abrams, 2015; Dworsky, Napolitano, & Courtney, 2013; Lee, Courtney, & Hook, 2012). Penzerro (2003), conducted a qualitative ethnographic study involving 12 individuals in a residential treatment facility and found the overrepresentation of former foster youth in the homeless population may be a continuation of effects from foster care drift. Individuals who become homeless display characteristics such as mental illness, institutional disaffiliation, and cultural associations that are similar to those displayed by foster youth during out-of-home placement (Penzerro, 2003).

Social Workers' Role

One important factor associated with child welfare and foster care is the role of the social worker. Social workers who work with the foster care population at the Division of Children and Family Services are placed in supportive roles such as resource worker, adoption specialist, differential response, and community enrichment specialist (Fein, Miller, Olmstead, & Howe, 1984; Fulcher & McGladdery, 2011). Although their main title is listed as a family service worker, these individuals are involved in supporting roles to monitor families progress during the out-of-home placement process. Family service workers engage foster care youth in the process of permanency planning to reunite the child with their family or help foster care youth obtain a permanent placement. These workers complete the following duties: attend court cases, complete case plans, court reports, make sure services/resources are put into place, schedule visitations, schedule medical appointments, and carryout other duties such as

transportation. One of the main goals of these individuals is to assist families in developing goals to achieve family reunification. If parental rights are terminated, these individuals help foster care youth by monitoring their care and participating in permanency planning.

An adoption specialist assists potential adoptive parents in the process of adopting children domestically and internationally. These individuals educate potential families and advocate for the child in foster care. Differential response workers investigate neglect cases such as educational, dangerous environments, or medical. These are cases that the hotline feels are not a priority and were put in place to prevent children from flooding into care. Differential response workers have 48 hours to determine if the family needs services put into place due to neglect. An investigator goes out into the home after a hotline call is received due to physical abuse or maltreatment. These cases are considered to be a priority over the neglect cases handled by the different response worker. Investigators are considered to be the "frontline worker." Community enrichment specialists also go out into the community and provide presentations to churches, schools, and other collaborating agencies.

Regarding foster care drift, case management and therapeutic social work roles can influence placement. Policies have altered the way bachelor-level social workers work with foster care youth and their families; however, there is still a disconnect between social workers' ability to help more youth achieve permanency. Mclean (2012) conducted a qualitative study interviewing 92 caseworkers on their collaborative practice and understanding of the management of school-age children in out-of-home care with

behaviors. It was found that the lack of staff resources, the pressure of agencies, lack of collaboration, and workload demands are barriers to permanency that social workers have mentioned in previous research (Mclean, 2012). Social workers have reported that the aforementioned barriers have prevented them from spending an adequate amount of time with children which eventually leads to foster parents removing children from their homes (Mclean, 2012).

Interventions and Policies

Foster care is a considered to be a temporary intervention, however, when youth are unable to be reunited with their family or adopted it often becomes long term. Policies on the national and local level have attempted to improve the processes surrounding foster care and foster youth. One of the first federal policies that promoted permanency planning was the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, which focused on reunification and adoption. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 was created as a result of continued foster care drift after foster care caseloads continued to rise in the 1980s and 1990s. Although these policies were created to minimize the risk of foster care drift, there appeared to still be a large number of children in foster care. The Child and Family Service Reviews results from 2001 to 2004 displayed every state failed to reach the national standards for the outcome "Children have permanency and stability in their living arrangements." Policies supporting child welfare need to be amended to support social workers and youth who experience foster drift (Bywaters, 2015). Policies on national and local levels influence the services provided to foster youth and youth aging out of care. The policies established on these

two levels were created to assist this vulnerable population in achieving permanency; however, there are still flaws in the child welfare system. Placement instability may occur due to the initiative of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Cross et al., 2013). The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 focuses on creating programs to increase family reunification; however, if biological families of foster youth are not able to meet the requirements of agencies within a 12-month period, their parental rights are terminated (Whitt-Woosley & Sprang, 2014). There is a gap in services the social worker is not able to fill.

For foster youth to be reunited with their biological family, their case plan must be completed within a 12-15 month time frame. This time frame has been set by the Adoption and Safe Families Act. The permanency plan or individual case plan is one of the first interventions used to prevent a child from going into foster care. The permanency plan is developed by family service workers at the Department of Children and Family Services. Developing a permanency plan allows the social workers to use a holistic approach with children and their family which helps provide multiple supports for the family to meet the needs of specific barriers. Local agency policies can impact placement stability, as well (Eggersten, 2008). Policies push agencies and social workers to meet the needs of foster youth and their families; however, without the tools to complete this task, there has been an increase in burnout in the social work profession (Murray, Tarren-Sweeney, & France, 2011). Individuals have resigned due to lack of training, lack of trust in the organization to provide appropriate resources or burnout.

Permanency planning has been shown to be an influential intervention in decreasing foster care drift. Achieving permanency is important for foster care youth because failure to do so has been associated with negative outcomes. When a child enters foster care, there is a possibility of exposure to changes in guardians, schools, healthcare providers, communities, and other personal attachments. Ellermann (2007), describes the process of entering foster care and moving from place to place as unsettling and dehumanizing. Foster care drift and instability in placement has been related to the decrease in developmental milestones, increase in behavioral problems, increased mental health costs, academic challenges, and juvenile delinquency (Wulczyn, 2004). After youth age out of care, alumni are at greater risk of poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, unemployment, health problems, mental health issues, criminal activity, and financial difficulties (Courtney et al., 2007).

The Federal Foster Care Program authorized by title IV-E of the Social Security Act provides services for foster care youth to promote a safe and stable out-of-home experience for children until they are returned home or achieve permanency (Children Bureau, 2012). Title IV-E monetary resources are available for the care and supervision of children in foster care, administrative costs to manage the program, training of staff and foster care providers, recruitment of foster families, and costs related to the design, implementation, and operation of state-wide data collection system (Children Bureau, 2012). Funds are awarded on a yearly basis after estimates are received on program expenditures. According to Field (2004), the existing debate on what is wrong with the allocation of foster care's monetary resources is focused on the lack of flexibility in the

federal Title IV-E program. Policy makers protest that Title I-VE reimburse child welfare agencies a percentage of the cost to keep children in out-of-home placement, but dismisses reimbursement for preventative interventions to avoid removal from the home. McDonald, Salyers, and Shaver (2004) also suggest that Title IV-E is inflexible and needs to be altered to promote permanent placement rather than financing foster care services. This ultimately prolongs the out-of-home placement process.

Policies developed for foster care youth often face issues such as individual's eligibility for services, inadequate funding sources for programs, coordination of services, and proper training for professionals working with this population (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Safety nets and services were developed to assist foster youth during the out-of-home placement process and transition period, but there appears to be a problem with social workers helping this population to achieve permanency. It is believed that if a permanent placement is achieved, the number of youth transitioning to adulthood who have the skills to be successful adults in society will increase (James, 2004). Additional research is needed to assist social workers in developing an intervention to decrease the number of individuals experiencing foster care drift.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Interventions

Policies, therapeutic interventions, and permanency planning are interventions used to address foster care drift. Although there are strengths to these interventions, weaknesses are also created due to gaps in services. Policies supporting the vulnerable population of foster youth on national and local levels have been amended throughout the years to promote agencies involvement in permanency planning. As mention previously,

a strength of The Adoption and Safe Families Act is the regulation of agencies to improve their services to families to expedite the process of reunification. If a family is unable to meet the regulations of the government after the 12-month period, parental rights are terminated. When parental rights are terminated, it becomes the responsibility of the agency to find permanent placement for the individual taken into the foster care system. This is not always achieved, and that fact contributes to increased numbers of individuals in foster care. Reunification is the goal of the child welfare system, but it is often difficult for social workers to help families due to the huge caseloads that they carry (Rycraft, 1994). Bachelor-level social workers who work with foster youth may experience burnout due to the stress of working with this vulnerable population (Fulcher & McGladdery, 2011). This creates difficulty in providing appropriate services to foster youth because social workers not only have few resources to give families but also struggle with maintaining a heavy caseload (Mclean, 2012).

Mental health interventions have been proven to assist individuals in achieving permanent placement (Jones, 2014; Pasztor, Holliger, Inkelas, & Halfon, 2006). Research suggests that with proper therapeutic interventions and resources, there is a possibility to decrease the number of individuals experiencing foster drift and placement instability. Problems surrounding mental health interventions include access to treatment, continuity of services, and parental involvements in services (Pasztor et al., 2006). Individuals in foster care have access to mental health treatment; however, the time required to enroll individuals in these services influences placement stability. Placement stability and workers' caseloads create obstacles in workers finding mental health treatment for foster

youth. Placement changes also create difficulty with foster youth remaining compliant with mental health services (Fulcher & McGladdery, 2011).

Studies have shown that it is difficult for researchers to address the social problems with out-of-home placement due to barriers that social workers face that is associated with the disruption of placement and interagency collaboration (Unrau, Chambers, Seita, & Putney, 2010; Mclean, 2012). Interventions have been proven to decrease problems that individuals face while experiencing out-of-home placement; however, there are problems and factors that have not been addressed regarding the role of the social worker. Power imbalances within agencies have shown to create challenges during permanency planning (Mclean, 2012). Mclean (2012) conducted a qualitative study interviewing 92 stakeholders that were involved with foster youth in collaboration practice and found that permanency decreased due to agencies pushing their agenda. Participants in this study included teachers, foster parents, child welfare workers, mental health clinicians, and residential care workers. The study suggests that permanency planning is a challenging process due to the different frameworks and ideals of multiples agencies attempting to enforce their practices.

Limitations of Research

Gaps in literature have shed light on the need for additional research on social workers' involvement in the child welfare system to decrease foster care drift. The role of the social worker regarding foster care needs to be redefined to promote permanency. There is limited research on the role of social workers when discussing foster care. Much of the literature detailing social workers' roles in foster care dates to the 1980s. There are

bachelor-level and master-level social workers who work with this population, but there is limited research on current barriers that impact their ability to help foster care youth achieve permanency. The current research about foster care youth has focused on the transitional-aged youth who are aging out of care and policies about permanency. Safety nets have been placed for transitional-aged youth; however, there is a need to assist this population in achieving permanency to stop them from aging out of care without permanent placement.

Summary

Foster care has been a social issue since the 1800s. In the last ten years, there has been an increase in permanency placement due to the Adoption and Safe Families Act, but there is still a need for additional interventions. Multiple interventions have been developed and implemented to support foster youth who enter the child welfare system and their families, but gaps in services persist. The current goal for foster youth is to seek family reunification rather than bringing individuals into foster care; however, this does not always happen. Interventions and policies need to be amended to support foster youth in obtaining permanency after parental rights are terminated. Additional studies are needed to evaluate issues and challenges that social workers face regarding foster care drift. The role of social workers and policies influencing their work with foster care needs to be amended. The following portion of the document, section 2 research design and data collection, will include the research design of the project, methodology, data analysis, and ethical procedures. For this study, I used a focus group to cocreate meaning

of foster care drift with social workers to gain an understanding of the social worker's knowledge of foster care drift.

Section 2: Research Design and Data Collection

Out-of-home placement and foster care drift continues to be a social problem in the child welfare system (Pecora et al., 2000). Foster drift is the prolonged period a child is in the child welfare system without obtaining permanent placement due to complexity developed through multiple placements (Freitas et al., 2014). Social workers continue to struggle with helping children achieve permanency, thus often failing to mitigate the impact of foster drift. The overall social work practice problem involved the issues and challenges front line social workers face in addressing foster care drift. Although the government has attempted to create interventions to alleviate this phenomenon, nearly 428,000 foster youth experience foster care drift at any given time (Pecora et al., 2000).

In Section 2 of this study I outline the research design of the project. Following that, I describe the method for data collection and participant selection for the project. The third portion of Section 2 contains discussion and analysis of the data collected. The final portion of the section provide an overall summary and analysis of the data collected from the participants.

Research Design

The social problem for this research project involved out-of-home placement. Out-of-home placement occurs when children are removed from their homes and placed in temporary living situations due to abuse or neglect (Ryan et al., 2016). Children who are not reunified with their families or placed in a permanent home age out of care and often struggle to thrive as adults in society (James, 2004). Foster care drift is the term used by researchers to define the prolonged period without permanent placement that

children may experience while in foster care (Freitas et al., 2014). The social work practice problem was foster drift and permanency. The research question of this capstone project was as follows:

> RQ: What are the issues and challenges that social workers engaged in foster care placement face regarding foster care drift?

I attempted to gain an understanding of the issues influencing permanency among the foster care population in the southeastern region of the United States. In this project, permanency was achieved when children had been discharged from foster care through means of reunification, relative custody, or adoption. Individuals who aged out of care or were placed in the juvenile justice system were not considered individuals who achieved permanency.

For this capstone research project I used an action-research methodology. I obtained data using a focus group with staff from one of the local Department of Human Services in the southeastern region of the United States. Action research was a method that empowered volunteers to discuss foster drift and the influences impacting their practice. This process occurred through social constructivism. Social constructivism is the process by which a researcher interacts with individuals in the community to develop the meaning of experiences together (Stanfield, 2000).

The methodology for this capstone project was action research. The research design involved action research using a qualitative design. I collected data using a focus group with individuals at a local Department of Human Service agency in the southeastern region of the United States. The focus groups consisted of volunteers who

possessed a social work degree and worked within the Division of Children and Family Service. An action-research methodology allowed me to become immersed in the community of social workers who work in this field of practice to cocreate meaning of foster drift and understand why social workers are struggling to help children achieve permanency (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010).

In the review of the academic literature, the following terms were defined in the literature review: child welfare, foster care, foster care drift, permanency planning, reunification, and transitional age youth. In this project, permanency was monitored in regard to permanent placement/adoption in any living situation such as kinship adoption, adoption, or reunification. Permanency planning is the process led by social workers to reunify children with their biological family or with an alternate permanent living situation (Miller et al., 1984). Permanency planning was a key component in this project and determined the placement of children in foster care. Issues and challenges surrounding permanency were explored during the focus group.

Methodology

The methodology for this project was action research. The research design for this project was a qualitative design using a focus group to collect data. A focus group was held at a local Arkansas child welfare agency. The focus group consisted of family service workers who had a social work degree on a bachelor's or master's level. I do not know how many individuals possess a social work degree at this local agency. A flyer was presented at the agency prior to the focus group to inform potential participants of the capstone project. The focus group was held after the agency's monthly meeting.

Participants were given a consent form and demographic questionnaire (see appendix D) before the start of the focus group. I followed a transcript to explore with the staff participants the issues and challenges that that they faced with permanency planning and foster care drift (see Appendix C).

I developed questions in the questionnaire to explore the participants' views toward agency policies, national policies, and permanency planning. Variables in this project that compose the data collected included: issues and challenges connected to foster care drift, social worker characteristics, resources needed by social workers to be successful in permanency planning, and local agency policies. The questionnaire for the focus group was developed to explore the social worker's belief of permanency and foster care drift in their agency. Social workers who participate in this project were monitored regarding their years in practice, licensure, and degree level. The participants addressed their practice and how policies impacted their ability to carry out the permanency planning process.

Participants

I used purposive sampling as the method to recruit participants. Purposive sampling is a nonprobability method that occurs when volunteers are selected by the researcher based on their knowledge of the topic of the study (Engel & Schutt, 2010). Purposive sampling allowed me to find social workers who had experience with foster care drift. Purposive sampling (Engel & Schutt, 2010) allowed me to gather individuals with common characteristics to discuss their opinions on what has worked and not worked in discussing foster care drift and permanency planning. An in-depth exploration

of participants' experience was the goal rather than generalizing their experiences to a larger population. The logic behind this decision was to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions of their experiences in child welfare and foster care drift. Participants included field social workers who handled permanency planning for foster care youth. These individuals worked at a local child welfare organization in the state of Arkansas. There are approximately 940 field workers spread among 75 counties in the state of Arkansas. For this capstone project, I anticipated that I would be able to obtain 8-10 volunteers who met the inclusion criteria. Volunteers only needed to meet for one focus group and be available for follow up questions.

The organization that was involved for this capstone project was a local human service agency located in the state of Arkansas. I obtained permission to post flyers at the agency. I initiated the selection process for participants via a phone call to the agency's main phone line to find out who had the power to allow a focus group to take place at the agency. After receiving permission, I sent an e-mail to explain the capstone project and request to hold a focus group at the agency. I provided flyers advertising the focus group to the contact person of the local child welfare agency. I sent an e-mail requesting the services of field social workers to the contact person so that person could share it with the organization (see Appendix B). The social workers who agreed to participate in the research study were asked to sign a consent form. The consent form informed the social workers of risks, unintended consequences such as the possibility that they might experience negative emotions, the potential benefits, and their rights (Engel & Schutt, 2010). It was important that the participants knew that they would receive an

analysis of the project displaying themes discussed in the focus group. The consent form informed the participants that they had the power and the right to withdraw from the focus group at any time. The participants were assured that they had the right to confidentiality. A meeting place, time, and date were provided via e-mail. Bachelor and master's level social workers at a local child welfare agency participated in a focus group that allowed me to gain insight on the concept of permanency and foster care drift.

Instrumentation

I used a focus group as the main method to gather data. The focus group allowed participants to express their experiences of the social problem (Stringer, 2007) and provide me with themes surrounding foster care drift. A focus group brought multiple individuals together so that they could share their perceptions and opinions on the social problem (Stringer, 2007). Focus groups are utilized to help the researcher cocreate meaning of the social problem with participants (Stringer, 2007). For this doctoral project, I provided a definition and current information on foster care drift to the participants. Then, I asked the scripted questions to gather data. I asked probing questions to gather data from the focus group (see Appendix C). Probing questions are questions that are reflective, objective, interpretive, and decisional (Stanfield, 2000). Action research is a method of self-reflective analysis by the researcher and individuals in the community (Stringer, 2007). Probing questions allow individuals in focus groups to freely discuss and give detailed information on their perception of the social problem by providing details on their interactions within the community.

The questions for the questionnaire were developed based on the information obtained in the literature review. Based on the academic literature, challenges such as policies and agency support impact social workers' ability to carry out the permanency planning process successfully. I developed questions to explore the aforementioned issues and other possible barriers that may cause issues in permanency on the micro, mezzo, and macro level. Utilizing a focus group allowed me to gain insight on the phenomenon of foster drift through the use of open-ended questions (see Creswell & Clark, 2007). After using a focus group as the data collection source, I coded data into categories and common themes. The research question was discussed in the focus group to analyze foster care drift, permanency, and out-of-home placement. The focus of this project was to understand the social worker's knowledge of foster care drift and to propose potential solutions to this issue. The ecological system theory guided the focus group questions. Questions explored the social worker's practice, interactions with the agency, and interactions with other local community agencies. Questions explored the policies that influence permanency planning, interagency collaboration, and agency collaboration.

Data Analysis

One way that data can be analyzed is through categorizing and sorting (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; McLean & Mohr, 1999; Power, 1996). There are three types of qualitative data analysis. The three types of data analysis are thematic, content, and discourse analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). In this project, data was coded using a thematic approach. Thematic analysis is created through

the data itself. This means that as the researcher, I looked for common themes, phrases, and words that were brought up in the focus group and combine them into common categories. When coding data, it is important that the researcher is aware of common themes related to the topic (Berkowitz, 1997, Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). I analyzed how patterns in the transcript related to the research question (Berkowitz, 1997; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006

The data collected in the focus group was analyzed in four steps. First, the focus group was transcribed. Second, the data was coded. During the coding process, I analyzed how volunteers answered each question and answers were grouped into common themes. After the common themes were developed, the themes were placed into categories. Third, I had three peer debriefers review the information to assess for personal bias in the data. Fourth, I analyzed what major themes emerged from the focus group and determined if they answered the research objectives.

Rigor of the Study

Validity in action research consists of showing the trustworthiness of the data (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Data is considered to be trustworthy when it comes from experts who have knowledge in that specific field (Mcniff & Whitehead, 2010). Two forms of validity are personal and social validation. Personal validation is the researchers' viewpoint of their work versus their biased opinions (Mcniff & Whitehead, 2010). Social validation is the review of collected data by peers, prior knowledge, and the general public (Mcniff & Whitehead, 2010). The methodology of action research is a co-constructive method that uses the experience of individuals in the community and

researcher's knowledge to develop meaning of the social problem in a given area (Mcniff & Whitehead, 2010). Rigor within action research is primarily focused on checks to ensure that outcomes of the study avoid biases of the researcher (Stringer, 2007). According to Stringer (2007), trustworthiness can be established through credibility, transferability, and dependability. For this study, validity and reliability were achieved in multiple steps. First, I informed the participants of his role in the research and provided a synopsis of the study before the start of the focus group. I attempted to remain objective by using an audit trail to monitor the data collection process throughout the study. I analyzed and compared the information collected from the focus group with information obtained from the literature review to seek comparisons. I provided participants with a copy of the transcript from the focus group and followed up with an email to verify the accuracy of information obtained. This process is called member checking.

The credibility of the study was achieved through member checking and triangulation (Stringer, 2007). Participants were given information on the subject of out-of-home placement and foster drift to inform them of current data on the social problem before the start of the focus group. Participants were given the opportunity to explore their personal experiences working in foster care. Member checking was achieved after individuals were given a copy of the transcript to verify that the information was correct. An email allowed participants to clarify and give additional information if needed on responses to questions from the focus group. Participants were given a copy of an executive summary of the results after the project was completed. Investigator triangulation was the method used to increase the rigor of the study. Investigator

triangulation involves using more than one researcher to analyze data with the goal of reducing bias and improving reliability (Schroepfer, Sanchez, Lee, Matloub, Waltz, & Kavanaugh (2009). Triangulation was achieved during the data analysis process. Three peer debriefers reviewed the transcribed focus group and spoke with me to discuss possible themes. The themes founded were compared to develop an understanding of the participant's understanding.

This study cannot be fully replicated however the steps and data collected for this project was written in sufficient detail so that it can be applied to another organization. Transferability is the ability of individuals to take information from the study and apply it to their situation (Stringer, 2007). The information gathered in this study applies to the southeastern region of the United States. A purposive sampling technique was used in this study. Participants were selected using specific criteria, which included possessing a social work degree and having experience working with foster care youth in the permanency planning process. A sample of seven individuals participated in the focus group. Six of the participants identified as being an African American female and one individual reported being White. The sample size and demographics of individuals who participated in the focus group makes it impossible to generalize the findings to a larger population. Although the information from this study is not a complete representation of the overall population of foster care, the results from this study will provide knowledge on foster care drift and possible solutions for child welfare agencies.

Dependability is the extent to which individuals can trust that all actions have been carried out to ensure a systematic process has been followed (Stringer, 2007). By

including an audit trail, the procedures of the research design can be followed and tracked to ensure that the procedures took place (Stringer, 2007). An inquiry audit is a trail of procedures that allows readers to follow along with the researcher's logic of the study (Stringer, 2007). An inquiry audit was used and checked by the committee chair. The inquiry audit for this project was composed of a journal in which I logged the steps completed during the research process. I documented all data collection and continue supervision with the capstone committee.

When rigor is achieved in action research, the perspectives and biases of the researcher are removed from the results to the extent that it is possible (Stringer, 2007). Outcomes that could compromise the data are minimized.

Ethical Procedures

The potential risk to participants include: unintended disclosure of confidential information, psychological stress greater than what would typically be experienced, attention to personal information that is irrelevant to the study, unwanted solicitation, unwanted intrusion of privacy other than the study, economic loss, coercion, misunderstanding of experimental deception, and harm to health. Benefits of participation in the study include the ability to provide additional information on the social problem known as foster drift and permanency planning. The research design ensures that participants have the right to confidentiality and informed consent. There was minimal risk for participants in this project. However, it was possible that responses to questions during the focus group could reveal ethical concerns in one's practice. It was possible that the organization's supervisor could have discovered the identity of

individuals who participated in the focus group. However, the anonymity of participants was maintained. The focus group occurred after the monthly organization meeting, and it was possible for the organization's supervisor to see the volunteers entering the focus group location. During the recruiting period, participants were asked to come to a secluded room after the organization's monthly meeting to maintain anonymous from peers. Participants were informed that possible answers to questions that go against social work ethics or expose illegal activity would result in a report to their supervisor. For example, as a mandated reporter, it is my duty to report incidents such as participants intentionally avoiding working with foster youth cases due to personal vendettas with foster families or foster youth. Participants were asked to avoid using names of foster youth, foster families, and foster youth biological families. Participants were given pseudonyms during the transcription process. Individuals created a pseudonym and recited their name each time before speaking so that the I could transcribe the focus group from the recording. Before the start of the focus group, individuals were asked to reframe from exposing other participant's identity and responses to questions outside of the focus group with other coworkers and peers. Individuals signed a right to confidentiality document that informed them of peer rights and their rights to confidentiality. Participants were given a demographic sheet before the start of the focus group and returned it anonymously (without signing or putting their names on the sheet). The demographic sheet contained questions regarding race, gender, and education (see Appendix D). The social workers who agree to participate in the research study were asked to sign a consent form.

The consent form informed the social workers of unintended consequences such as the possibility that they might experience negative emotions, the potential benefits, and their rights (Engel & Schutt, 2010). Participants were informed that an analysis of the project would be given to them and the organization after the project has been completed. The consent form informed the participants that they had the power and the right to withdraw from the focus group at any time. A script was used in carrying out the focus group (see Appendix C).

Hard copies of the materials are kept in a locked cabinet that is secured in the my home. The focus group was recorded using two handheld recording device that are kept in a cabinet as well. Information on the laptop used to document and record data is secured with a passcode. After the project has ended, hard copies will be scanned into a computer and saved on a password protected hard drive. Hard copies of the materials will then be shredded.

Summary

An action-research methodology allowed me to co-create meaning of the social problem foster drift. After coding and analyzing the data from the focus group, I re-evaluated the research question and developed possible theories surrounding foster care drift. Section 3 of the doctoral project will include data-analysis techniques and findings.

Project Section 3: Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate social workers' knowledge of foster care drift to improve the permanency planning process of social work practice in the foster care system. By gaining an understanding of the social workers' perceptions of foster care drift, I was able to assist with the development of feasible solutions to permanency planning in the southeastern region of the United States. The research question was as follows:

> RQ: What are the issues and challenges that social workers engaged in foster care placement face regarding foster care drift?

The research question guided the study to explore the challenges that workers who are engaged in the role of foster care placement encounter during the permanency planning process. As a family service worker, the social worker's ultimate goal in the process of permanency planning is to facilitate the reunification of foster care youth with their families or to assist in obtaining other permanent placement.

An action research methodology provided the opportunity to obtain information from the experiences of social workers in the family service role at Division of Children and Family Services. Action research is a methodology that facilitates the exploration of a social problem utilizing individuals within the community. These individuals were chosen based on their daily experiences and encounters with the phenomenon being studied. The family service workers at the Division of Children and Family Services shared their personal experiences regarding foster care drift and out-of-home placement.

Participants were able to define foster care drift, discuss challenges influencing social work practice at the micro level, and develop viable solutions.

A nonprobability method known as purposive sampling was used to recruit volunteers at the Division of Children and Family Services. Purposive sampling gathers a sampling population with common characteristics (Engel & Schutt, 2010). The sample population consisted of family service workers that worked at the Division of Children and Family Services, possessed a bachelor's or master's degree in social work, and played a role in the permanency planning process. Seven family service workers volunteered to participate in the focus group, with a meeting time of one hour and thirty minutes at one of the organization's local offices. The focus group was held in a private and secured meeting room at one of the regional offices to maintain confidentiality. All participants identified their gender as female. Six of the seven family participants identified as African American. The other individual identified as White. The average time that workers worked for the organization ranged from two months to twenty years. The focus group was conducted to gather data on how social workers from a local Division of Children and Family Services agency in the southeastern region of the United States, view foster care drift in their role as a family service worker.

Section 3 contains three segments exploring the process of data collection, findings of the study, and a summary of information provided. In the first part I describe the data analysis techniques. In the second part of section 3 I discuss how the findings from the focus group answer the research question. The final portion of the document provides an overall summary and analysis of the data collected from the participants.

Data Analysis Techniques

In the following section I discuss the time frames for data collection, data analysis procedures, validation procedures, and limitations of the study. I identify the time frames for the data collection process along with the actual recruitment of participants. Following the time frame for data collection, I examined the data analysis procedures to describe how information was coded and inspected for researcher bias. Third, I discuss validation procedures regarding member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation, and reliability. Finally, I evaluate the limitations of the study.

The focus group, conducted in February, 2018, lasted for 1 hour and 30 minutes with seven family service workers from the Division of Children and Family Services. Participants engaged with each other and openly responded to questions throughout the focus group. I audio-recorded the meeting to analyze the data using four steps. I took two days to transcribe the recorded audio. I used two additional days to code the transcription into common themes. First, I used 1 day to transcribe the audio-recording of the meeting verbatim into a Microsoft Word document. Second, I coded and outlined the data using a thematic approach with Microsoft Word. I combined common themes, phrases, and words that presented multiple times in the transcript into categories. I then broke these categories down into major themes. Third, as part of the validation procedures, I used three peer debriefers to assess themes for researcher bias or missed information. Debriefers were given 24 hours to review the transcripts and the reflective journals. I conducted 30-minute meetings with each debriefer. I analyzed the coded themes again to determine if the research question was fully addressed.

Throughout the data analysis process, I inspected the rigor and validity of the study. In the next section of this document I discuss how validation procedures were utilized during this phase. I examine validation procedures such as member checking, use of peer debriefers, and triangulation.

Validation Procedures

Validity in qualitative research design is achieved by establishing and maintaining a sense of trustworthiness in the data collected (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). This process can be established by putting checks in place throughout the data collection phase to verify the outcomes of the research are without personal bias. I used strategies such as member checking, use of peer debriefers, and triangulation in this study to increase the validity. In the validation procedures section I further examine these checks and discuss them in the following order: member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation.

Member checking is a process that increases the credibility of the study by verifying that the audio from the focus group is transcribed correctly. Member checking ensures that the participant's thoughts were captured correctly so that the coding process is a true interpretation of the focus group and participants' thoughts. The family service workers who participated in the focus group were provided with my e-mail address immediately after the focus group ended. This created the opportunity for participants to follow up with additional questions or information not reported during the focus group. After I transcribed the focus group, I sent copies via e-mail to the family service workers. Seven days were given to participants to follow up with corrections or additional information. All of the participants reported that the transcript appeared to be correct.

After the transcript was coded, the participants were asked follow up questions to clarify responses to solutions regarding the social problem and research question. The encouragement of additional follow-up questions and member checking provided the opportunity to gather an in-depth understanding of the information collected.

I used three peer debriefers to assess the data for researcher bias and to review themes and coding after the transcript was coded and placed into common themes. A licensed professional counselor and Walden University doctoral candidate in Counseling Education and Supervision served as one of the peer debriefers (peer debriefer 1). Peer debriefer 1 currently works at a nonprofit organization providing outpatient and school-based counseling to children and adolescents. She has experience working with foster care youth and their families in a therapeutic setting.

Peer debriefer 2 was a licensed certified social worker in the state of Arkansas. She serves as a supervisor at a nonprofit organization that provides therapeutic services to the community. This peer debriefer also has experience providing outpatient therapy to children in foster care. The nonprofit organization at which she is currently employed has a special therapeutic foster care program. This program works closely with foster care youth and foster care parents in a clinical and home setting.

The last peer debriefer was an Arkansas licensed master social worker who worked as a clinical care manager (peer debriefer 3). Peer debriefer 3 also had experience providing outpatient therapy to children in foster care. She currently reviews outpatient and inpatient claims on children who receive Arkansas Medicaid. In this

position, she works with family service workers to help find placement for foster care youth after an inpatient placement.

All three peer debriefers denied affiliation with the agency from which I recruited participants. The individuals chosen as peer debriefers were former colleagues of mine. I gave the transcripts along with reflective journals to the debriefers. I used reflective journals to document my thoughts and feelings after the focus group. I also took notes during the focus group to record the experience while it was occurring. I gave the journals to the peer debriefers to analyze for personal bias. The peer debriefers had 48 hours to review the materials. After reviewing the materials, I contacted them by telephone, and I conducted a 30-minute meeting to discuss the transcript and themes.

Peer debriefer 1 reported that the identified themes appeared to be valid based on the responses from the transcript and reflective journals. Peer debriefer 2 reported that common themes appeared to be foster care youth sabotaging placement, laws and systems, and foster families and biological families. However, peer debriefer 2 reported that she was able to see the connection between our themes after a 30-minute meeting. Peer debriefer 3 reported that she agreed with the themes; however, she believed that it was important to differentiate between parenting education and foster care parent training. Peer debriefer 3 believed that the family service workers discussed parent education and foster care parent training as two separate ideas. Peer debriefer 3 reported that the participants discussed parent education as teaching parents how to become proper guardians and independent individuals. I informed peer debriefer 3 that the Children's Bureau defines parent education as training, programs, or any intervention that aids

parents in gaining skills to develop their parenting and communication with their children to decrease the risk of maltreatment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Parent education can be taught in an individual or group setting. It can be taught via different media such as direct instruction, discussion, videos, modeling, or other formats. Peer debriefer 3 reported that foster care parent training, on the other hand, is the continuing education for foster care parents on how to take care of youth in foster care. Peer debriefer 3 reported that the family service workers discussed parent education more than foster care parent training, and parent education should be one of the main themes.

Investigator triangulation occurred during the transcription and data analysis process. Investigator triangulation involves using more than one researcher to analyze data with the goal of reducing bias and improving reliability (Schroepfer et al., 2009). Three peer debriefers reviewed the transcribed focus group data and discussed possible themes with me. The themes the three peer debriefers and found were compared to develop an understanding of the participants' understanding of foster care drift. This understanding is explored in the findings section of this document.

I took multiple steps to increase the rigor and validity of the study such as member checking and use of peer debriefers. The peer debriefers were given 48 hours to review the transcript and my reflective journals. After reviewing the transcript and reflective journal, I contacted the peer debriefers by telephone and conducted a 30-minute meeting to discuss the transcript and themes. Completing these steps provided checks throughout the data collection process, which strengthened the study. However, there are

still limitations that could impact the study findings. I discuss these limitations in the next section.

Limitations of Study

Although the design of this study was carefully organized, it is known that there are still limitations. Limitations of the study include the sample size and demographics of family service workers who participated in the focus group, engagement with peer debriefers, and participants' feedback. The sample size and demographics of individuals who participated in the focus group makes it impossible to generalize the findings to a larger population. A purposeful sampling technique was used which could have prompted selection bias. Individuals were selected using specific criteria, which included having a social work degree and experience working with foster care youth in the permanency planning process.

It can also be noted that there was limited engagement with the peer debriefers in this study. Peer debriefers were provided with the focus group transcript and my reflective journals. The peer debriefers were given forty-eight hours to review the documents. After reviewing the documents, I held three separate thirty-minute telephone meetings with the peer debriefers to discuss possible themes. All three peer debriefers came to the same conclusion on common themes, however, peer debriefer 3 reported that parent education and foster care training should be divided into separate themes. She reported that parent education was discussed more than foster parent training in the focus group. This theme was accepted and shared with peer debriefer 1 and 2.

Another limitation of the study was the limited amount of feedback from participants after the initial focus group. Participants provided feedback and answered additional questions after the initial focus group, however, eventually stopped responding. All seven participants responded to the first round of follow up questions. In the second round of follow up questions, only five participants provided additional feedback. During the third round of follow up questions, only two individuals responded.

The findings of the focus group will be explored in the next section.

Overview of Sample and Key Characteristics

The following section will discuss the descriptive statistics of the social workers who participated in the focus group. First, the demographics of the sample population will be examined. Second, a review and summary of each participant will follow.

The Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Children and Family Services annual fourth quarter performance report reported a total of 436 workers within the organization (Joyce, 2015). Data was collected in the southeastern region of the United States, one of 75 counties in Arkansas. The focus group consisted of seven family service workers who had obtained a bachelor's degree in social work. All seven individuals identified as female. Six of the seven family service workers identified as African American and the other individual identified as White. The average time that workers reported working for the organization ranged from two months to twenty years. Participants reported that they were not surprised by the research study and social problem of out-of-home placement.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Experience	License
P01	52	F	AA	20yr	N
P02	45	F	AA	18yr	N
P03	36	F	AA	8yr	N
P04	33	F	AA	10yr	N
P05	52	F	AA	20yr	N
P06	24	F	AA	2m	N
P07	24	F	W	1yr	Y

Note. AA = African American, W = White, F = Female, yr = year, m = month

The family service workers in the focus group will be referred to as Participant 01, Participant 02, Participant 03, Participant 04, Participant 05, Participant 06, and Participant 07. All seven individuals who participated in the focus group hold the position title of Family Service Worker.

Some of these individuals not only hold the title of family service worker but are also involved in supporting roles such as an adoptive specialist, investigator, community enrichment specialist, and differential response. Professional duties of family service workers include attending court cases, completing case plans, completing court reports, making sure services/resources are put into place, scheduling visitations, scheduling medical appointments, and carrying other duties such as transportation.

An adoption specialist assists potential adoptive parents in the process of adopting children domestically and internationally. Adoption specialist educates potential adoptive families and advocate for the child in foster care. Differential response workers investigate neglect cases such as educational, dangerous environments, or medical. These are cases that the hotline feels are not a priority and were put in place to prevent children from flooding into care. Differential response workers have 48 hours to determine if the family needs services put into place due to neglect. An investigator goes out into the home after a hotline call is received due to physical abuse or maltreatment. These cases are considered to be a priority over the neglect cases handled by the different response worker. Investigators are considered to be the "frontline worker." Community enrichment specialists also go out into the community and provide presentations to churches, schools, and other collaborating agencies.

Participant 01 is an African American female who performs the role as a differential response worker (DR). Differential response workers investigate neglect cases such as educational, dangerous environments, or medical. These are cases that the hotline feels are not an emergency. Differential response workers have 48 hours to determine if the family needs foster care services due to neglect. Participant 01's attention during the focus appeared to be directed towards educating the parent, lack of resources (mental health services, monetary resources, community support) for families, lack of monetary resources within the organization, communication issues within the organization, and provisional care.

Participant 02 is an African American female who serves as a family service worker that handles foster care cases. Participant 02 discussed the lack of monetary resources within the organization, need for reallocation of monetary resources to the family, burnout, developing programs within the organization to meet the specific needs of individuals, creating additional jobs, and educating the parent. The majority of Participant 02's statements appeared to revolve around the Arkansas Department of Human Services creating a new system that eliminates the need to go out and collaborate with other organizations to produce services.

Participant 03 is an African American female who serves as a family service worker that handles foster care cases. Participant 03 discussed the need for additional transitional living programs for foster youth aging out of foster care, burnout, and the need for independent living programs for youth that age out of foster care.

Participant 04 is a Caucasian female who serves as an investigator. An investigator goes out into the home after a hotline call is received due to physical abuse or maltreatment. These cases are considered to be a priority over the neglect cases handled by the differential response worker. Investigators are considered to be the "frontline worker." P04 discussed burnout, provisional care, need for parent education, need for additional workers, lack of communication within the agency, reallocation of monetary resources back into the family, and reallocation of monetary resources back into the organization. Participant 04 is also the only participant who is an Arkansas Licensed Social Worker at a bachelor's level.

Participant 05 is an African American female who serves as a community enrichment specialist. These individuals recruit foster parents. Community enrichment specialists also go out into the community and provide presentations to churches, schools, and other collaborating agencies. The majority of Participant 05's comments revolved around educating the parent and foster care parent. Participant 05 also discussed creating a better fit between the foster care youth and foster care parent by increasing foster care parents' awareness of potential behaviors.

Participant 06 and Participant 07 were African American females that served as family service workers that handle foster care cases. Both participants appeared to be two of the younger and least experienced workers among the group. Neither of these workers were assigned an additional role outside of being a family service worker. These two individuals reported that foster care drift was a current problem within the organization and were in agreement with the aforementioned issues addressed by other participants in the focus group.

Findings

The following section will provide an in-depth review of the findings. The focus group provided answers to the research question:

RQ: What are the issues and challenges that family service workers face regarding foster care drift?

There were three broad themes discovered during the coding process. These themes included: ineffective communication, need for improved parent education and training materials, and unhelpful allocation of Division of Children and Family Services monetary

resources. There are three identified solutions to the aforementioned challenges. One solution is improving the Division of Children and Family Services system of communication by creating a central operating system for all organizations under the Department of Human Services umbrella. Another solution offered is the allocation of Division of Children and Family Services monetary resources to focus on uplifting the family through means of additional services that Medicaid would not cover (mental health, housing, substance abuse). The final solution suggested is the development of hands-on education and independent living skills courses for parents

The following section will explore the themes discovered in the focus group. The participants were asked at the outset of the interview their knowledge of foster care drift. The themes associated with this are captured below. A summary of the participant's knowledge about foster care drift will be explored. Afterwards, the subsequent sections will explore how the themes of the focus group answer the research question and impact the social work practice problem. Unexpected findings will also be examined.

Participant Knowledge About Foster Care Drift

Participants were asked about their knowledge regarding foster care drift. Three of the seven family service workers reported knowing the term foster care drift. Overall, foster care drift was described as a long-term process that often involves foster care youth aging out of care without the support and independent living skills. The participants reported that one theme of foster care drift is foster care youth aging out of foster care. Participant 01 described foster care drift in the following manner:

> The child comes into foster care at a certain age and does not find permanent placement. They bounce around from foster home to foster home, behavioral facility to a behavioral, and place to place until they age out of foster care. [They] Never find an actual placement whether it be with a family member or adopted home. They just end up aging out of care.

Participant 01 discussed foster care drift in terms of foster care youth having multiple placement disruptions. Participant 01 suggested that after foster care youth are "bounced from foster home to foster home," they eventually end up spending time in residential treatment facilities due to behavioral issues or for contract beds until eventually aging out of care.

Effects of Aging Out

Some of the long-term effects of foster care drift included aging out of care without a support system and government assistance which could sometimes lead to homelessness. Participant 03 stated:

> I've seen foster care children age out of care and not have a place to go. They are living on the street. It's a sad situation when a child has been to foster care. When they get out, they don't have a place to go or have anybody that they can count on for support.

In the state of Arkansas, foster care youth between the ages of 18-21 who age out of foster care no longer have access to government support under Division of Children and Family Services (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2017). Although there are multiple transitional living programs and independent living programs, there are

sometimes certain criteria that must be met for foster care youth to participate (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2018). For instance, youth may be required to attend college, work at least twenty hours a week, and attend skill-based courses. These services are for foster care youth between the ages of 18-21 (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2018).

Participant 02 also seemed to agree with Participant 01 and Participant 03. Participant 02 reported that the system of foster care appeared to be an endless cycle that either needs to be addressed at the front end of the foster care process when a child comes into care or the ending stages when the individual ages out of care. Participant 02 described this cycle as following:

> If it's not something that is a quick fix. The judge doesn't adjudicate when they [foster care youth] get in foster care. Nine times out of ten you can look at somebody and say, these kids are never going home because you can just see it. However, if we put that little bit in on the front end to help them, I think that it would stop some of the foster kids coming into [foster] care which would alleviate some of the older kids coming into [foster] care and aging out of [foster] care. I'm like we have to have some kind of backup system because they are [foster care youth] going to forever come back. If they do not come back as a foster child, they're going to come back as a parent of a child who has now entered foster care, so either way it go, they are going to be back the system and we have to do something to close that revolving door and stop that cycle.

Participant 02 addressed the need for additional frontline interventions to prevent older children from coming into care. Participant 02 suggested that nine out of ten individuals who need additional services on the front end of foster care services can be identified. Providing interventions on the frontline of foster care would reduce the number of children coming into care. She also discussed the need for improved transitional services for individuals who age out of care to assist with the transition out of foster care. A large amount of foster care youth experience foster care drift and struggle with aging out of care although programs such as transition living programs have been developed as a safety net. This is leading to a large population of foster care youth attempting to survive without assistance as adults. Foster care drift is a problem in the foster care system that has long-term effects on individuals within the community.

The next three sections will discuss themes associated with the participants' perception of challenges that are influencing the family service workers' inability to decrease foster care drift in the southeastern region of the United States. Three broad themes were discovered during the coding process. These themes included: ineffective communication, need for improved parent education and training materials, and unhelpful allocation of Division of Children and Family Services monetary funding.

Theme 1: Ineffective Communication

According to the participants, ineffective communication within the foster care system was a major theme that prevented family service workers from properly carrying out the permanency planning process. Participants reported that ineffective communication delayed the access to information needed for permanency planning. Two

sub-themes addressed within the overarching theme of ineffective communication were ineffective communication among family service workers and ineffective communication between Division of Children and Family Services and other organizations in the Department of Human Services. First, ineffective communication among family service workers within the Division of Children and Family Services will be discussed. Second, the ineffective communication between the Division of Children and Family Services and other organizations under the Department of Human Services umbrella will be examined.

Ineffective Interagency Communication

When seeking placement in another county, the current family service worker will first attempt to contact facilities in the area for a contract bed (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2017). If the facilities are at capacity, the family service worker has their supervisor contact the opposing county supervisor to see if there are any foster homes available (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2017). If a contract bed or foster home placement is available, a secondary family service worker in that county will assist the current family service worker with the foster care child's family visitations, appointments, and transportation (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2017). The secondary family service worker is required to visit the foster care child at least once a week. The current family service worker can see if the secondary family service worker is making contact with the foster care child by reading the documentation in the agency's database system known as the CHRIS (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2017). Per policy, the primary worker is required to make contact with their foster care child at least once a month face to face (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2017).

Ineffective interagency communication was reported to have prevented workers from obtaining information that could have prevented a child from coming into foster care or finding permanent placement. Participant 04 discussed the lack of interagency communication between counties. Foster care youth may experience placements changes that require them to be transferred to another county within the state. When this occurs, information that could help foster care youth obtain permanent placement is lost due to the ineffective communication. Ineffective communication among family services workers appeared to delay the access to information needed for foster care youth on the workers' caseload. Participant 04 described some of the communication challenges as follows:

> There's no communication. If you're not within that county, there's none [communication]. Nobody answers their phone. Nobody responds to email. I mean we all live in the same state. It would be so much nicer to get a phone call. I'm [usually] reaching out because they have a history over there or a possible provisional in another county. It's just like as soon as you cross the line to another county, it's [communication] is just dead.

Participant 04 discussed how a family service worker in one county might possess the information that could help foster youth obtain a provisional placement within another county. However, it seems that once that child receives a new family service worker across county lines, the permanency process is started over due to the inability to obtain information regarding provisional care in the child's previous county. Communication

within the agency has created a challenge for social workers attempting to help foster care youth and decrease foster care drift by securing a provisional placement.

Ineffective Communication Among Department of Human Service Organizations

Participant 01 expanded on communication challenges by discussing the lack of communication among organizations under the umbrella of the Department of Humans Services and the Division of Children and Family Services. Families who receive services from the Department of Human Services provide organizations with information that could be beneficial when their children are brought into foster care. Often, this information is not received by family services workers. This information could assist investigators or "frontline workers" in preventing foster care youth from coming into foster care. Participant 01 explained the communication issue as following:

> Parents will turn in every piece of documentation that they need to turn into the CO [County Operation] so that they do not get their food stamps, insurances, and other benefits stopped. So the Division of County Operations has all kinds of information that would be great for us to have, but they do not want you to have that because they do not want you to know.

Participants in the focus group expressed concerns that organizations under the umbrella of the Department of Human Services fail to collaborate to meet the needs of individuals in the community. Information that could determine placements for families could be accessible if other agencies were willing to collaborate, however children often float through the system due to the lack of communication with collaborating agencies. P04 stated:

> We found court documents that give guardianship to other members in the family. We do not have to take custody of that child because the parent does not even have [legal] guardianship or have custody. Somebody else does. But they [collaborating organizations] didn't want to tell us that. They preferred the child to go in foster care.

One worker discussed the need for one database system that would hold all of the information obtained by divisions under the Department of Human Services. This would streamline the process of family service workers obtaining information which would increase placement stability. Participant 01 discussed having one system and reported the following:

> [It would be faster] If we had access to it instead of having to go find somebody who can do this search for me. Well if I had it right here on my computer. I can search [for] that [information] myself and make sure that whoever needs the information has the information.

Participant 01 believed that communication issues could be decreased by creating an all-encompassing database system that shared information of organizations within the Department of Human Services. It is believed that foster care drift can be decreased if gaps in communication closed by eliminating the need to go through other organizations to obtain information.

The participants believe that foster care drift can be decreased by minimizing communication challenges within the system of foster care. Improving communication

among family services workers during case transitions and developing a central database system are considered possible solutions by the participants.

Theme 2: Unhelpful Allocation of Agency Monetary Funding

Another theme discussed in the focus group is the Division of Children and Family Service unhelpful allocation of monetary funding. Participants reported that the organization's allocation of funding are generally focused on services that keep children in foster care rather than reunification or adoption. First, allocation of Division of Children and Family Services monetary funding will be discussed in terms of services that are not covered by Division of Children and Family Services. These services typically involve drug rehabilitation, intensive outpatient counseling, parenting classes, or independent living classes. Second, the reallocation of monetary resources will be analyzed.

Lack of Monetary Funding for Family Services

One issue that appeared to arise when discussing monetary support was the lack of funding for family services and resources. The family service workers identified services they believed families need to maintain stability, however, they also reported that the Division of Children and Family Services falls short in providing effective services to families. Participant 04 stated:

> We need more providers, but we need to be able to pay for people. We try to use stuff that's free. Because they [Division of Children and Family Services] do not like us spending money. As an investigator, I'll go out and I know that there's something going on. I know there's maltreatment somewhere, but I can't see it and

> I can't prove it. I know this family needs counseling. I know this family needs that [service].

The participants discussed a range of services like drug rehabilitation, intensive outpatient counseling, parenting classes, or independent living classes. Participant 04, however, continued to focus on counseling. Participant 04 stated:

> I mean they need a lot of stuff, but I know they need counseling. And I'm being told that I cannot give them counseling unless I open a case. Because we are not going to be pay for that. So why am I going to wait until I have probable cause for abuse or neglect in order to give them counseling when I could have stopped it from happening in the first place? And to be able to actually provide adequate services to our clients. The fact that this is even a problem is so ridiculous to me because we're the Department of Human Services and we do not provide services unless we absolutely have to.

Based on the following response from Participant 04, collaborating organizations within the community that are able to provide services to these families are not willing to work with the Division of Children and Family Services. This issue is created due to the Division of Children and Family Services unwillingness to pay for specialized services.

Participant 02 appeared to agree with Participant 04's statements on the Division of Children and Family Services lack of motivation to pay for services for families. Participant 02 added to Participant 04's statements and discussed how monetary resources for organizations under the umbrella of the Department of Human Services are spread thin. Participant 02 stated:

> I do not think they are working smart when it comes to spending money because we have too many different pieces of the pie that's sectioned off to different people. DHS [Arkansas Department of Human Services] is the last one who receives what they need. If we had our own and we were in control of it, then I think that it would run much smoother. Then with the providers, the Medicaid and the pay. That's why people choose not to deal with us because they sliced Medicaid so, that they're not getting half the money. The money's always there but never for us and that's how you feel because recently we all got a raise. I'm putting that in air quotes because that's what it was called. We received literally pennies on the dollar where as some people received $20 on the dollar. But we also have the money and so if you stop putting the money where it doesn't need to go, and you're saying we have all these kids in foster care we need all of these things. We need more workers. We need places for kids to go before they even have to go to a foster home. And if you just allocate the money right all of that stuff could happen but then again it always comes down to the money.

Participant 02 believed that the Division of Children and Family Services had access to monetary resources. Participant 02 reported that although the organization has access to funding, the funding was allocated in the wrong place.

Reallocation of Monetary Funding

Currently, the Division of Children and Family Services' monetary funding is geared toward paying foster care parents to house foster care youth. Participant 03 agreed with Participant 02 and discussed a possible solution to the issue of monetary

funding. Participant 03 discussed creating an all-encompassing private owned facility that has everything needed for foster youth and their families. Participant 03 stated:

> They have a counseling center that's there in the facility. It's set up like a dorm. It's even attached to the juvenile system, so they don't have to travel to go to court. In the center is the playground area for the parents to do their visitation. The child never goes to a foster home until the court adjudicates. They either go to a foster home or go back home with the parent. But they never have to go to a foster home or go to a shelter. We can even do it ourselves. The money that we're contracting out for emergency shelter beds and resident. We can do that ourselves and save some of that money and you got everything at your one stop shop right here. They go to school there. They get their medicine there. When they come into care, everything they need is right here until they are adjudicated. We have to think smart.

Participant 03 believed that by creating an all-encompassing facility, the Division of Children and Family Services would be able to decrease the cost of contracting emergency shelter beds and foster homes. She believed that the Division of Children and Family Services already had the revenue to fund such a facility, however was using that revenue to reach out to external support. Participant 03 desires for the Division of Children and Family Services to develop services within the organization to handle the needs of foster care youth and their family. This could be achieved by reallocating the organization's monetary resources back into the organization.

Instead of building a facility, Participant 02 discussed allocating resources from the foster family to the foster care youth's legal guardian to assist with reunification. Participant 02 suggested that instead of giving a stipend of $1,200 a month to a foster family, the monetary funds could be given to the family for reunification or Division of Children and Family Services for the development of services. Participant 02 believed that keeping foster care youth with their families and allocating monetary resources back into the family would decrease the percentage of youth experiencing foster care drift. Participant 02 stated:

> I feel like if you are going to go to a home and do a removal because the mom has no utilities we have to think what happened to cause this. If her utilities are off because she lost a job and she's having some issues right now, that's $1200 a month for three kids that you're going to pay a foster parent. Put that $1200 into getting her utilities turned back on. Hook her up with some counseling, refer her to somewhere that's going to give her some job training or whatever to see what it is because the money that you waste with placement could be given to the parent. I would not give it directly to the parent. I would pay their utility bill because you're saving. You're keeping a family together. The money that you're paying a foster home for three or four months, put that money into that family. Get those utilities on, give them some groceries, help them get what they need to get stabilized.

Three of the seven participants discussed the need to improve the allocation of the Division of Children and Family Services' monetary funding. The participants'

responses lead to an overall need of programs and services to support families at the "frontline." Although supporting agencies offer their resources to aid foster care youth and their families, services provided are not effective due to the Division of Children and Family Services inability to pay for specialized services due to Title IV-E. In doing this, agencies are neglecting the specific needs of foster care youth and their families.

Theme 3: Need for Improved Parent Education and Training Materials

Based on respondents' reports, a major theme was reported regarding the need for improved parent education and training materials. This theme can be divided into two sub-themes: ineffective parenting education and a lack of independent living skills. According to the data collected in the focus group, it is believed that effective parent education and independent living skills for the guardian play a critical role in the permanency of foster care youth.

Effective Parent Education

Although there are classes offered to families and foster families, many of the participants in the focus group felt as though the current educational classes offered by the Division of Children and Family Services were not effective. Participant 02 described a situation in which a family received parent education, a monetary stipend, and furniture. However, was still unsuccessful in keeping the child out of foster care. She reported that a family continued to make mistakes which ultimately ended with their child being placed in foster care. Participant 02 stated:

> We furnished her whole house. Furniture got a refrigerator, got a stove, all the kids got beds, people bought clothes, we took up money, we bought food and I'm

> thinking, you could get $900, $1,000 okay we're not going to worry about that, we go all in. We get them situated and we think we're doing good and then here comes the school calling, there's issues and then go right back out there to the house and I'm like we did everything from getting washers and dryers to everything to set these people up and had to turn around and bring all five of these kids into care and they're still in care. Her mindset hasn't changed. So it does come down to educating the parenting and trying to get them to a point where, okay I can breathe.

Participant 04 appeared to agree with Participant 02 and discussed the impact of the lack of effective parenting education on foster youth and their families. Participant 04 stated the following:

> The life they know now is the life they've only ever known. And if they were to have something more, to have a knowledge not just about parenting but nutrition, financial management, anger management. Things that we could put in their hands before there's ever a problem. I think we're not willing to spend money on that.

Participant 04 statements displayed the need for additional parent education courses for legal guardians to increase stability within the family. Based on her response, legal guardians may receive financial support from the Division of Children and Family Services however may lack the skills to thrive as a guardian or independent adult. Implementing parental education that focus on nutrition, financial management, and anger management may decrease the number of children coming into care.

Independent Living Skills

The second sub-theme involved a lack of independent living skills. In addition to the material resources like monetary stipends and furniture, it is vital for guardians to learn independent living and to be self-sufficient and stable enough to provide adequate care to their children. Parents may not be able handle simple tasks such as keeping the electricity on because they lack the skills to manage finances. These skills assist in budgeting for bills and expenses. Participant 02 added to her comments and stated:

> We do have independent living classes but to me they are not geared for the right things. If you are going to teach them true independence, do a class in the kitchen. Let them make a grocery list out, go to the grocery store and shop and we going to come back and we going to prepare this meal for the class. They may not know how to pay bills. They don't know how to buy groceries. They do not even know how to budget. These are some things that they need to do. Take them out, don't do independent living class on Monday night, do a Saturday and take them out.

Providing independent living skills and parent education classes that include hands on experiences gives legal guardians the opportunity to gain the knowledge needed to be a successful independent adult and guardian to dependent.

Unexpected Findings

As the researcher, I discovered unexpected findings in the focus group meeting. These include the current focus on provisional care and the influence of judicial preference on placement. Provisional care is a placement where a child can achieve residential stability in a familiar environment with a family member or known person.

Provisional placements support reunification efforts and participates in weekly visitations with parents (Arkansas Department of Human Services, 2016). The reunification between the removed children with their families is the current goal of Division of Children and Family Services. However, the participants reported that a secondary goal of provisional care is starting to emerge. Participant 04 reported that provisional care is emphasized at the front end of foster care when the child is initially taken from home. Although provisional placement is provided as an option during out of placement for families, it is not always achieved due to the lack of family services workers available or due to the judge's personal preference on placement. Participant 04 stated:

> I think that the more upfront we are with it, the better it works out but sometimes it not even talked about until after the child is already in foster care. But if it's not on the front end before you submit the affidavit for the probable cause hearing, there is a lot of issues afterwards. Families can only go to one office. They have the MLK office in order to actually apply to become provisional because only one person is able to do the background checks and everything. The document isn't the difficult part, it's making sure that one person is available in order to do the background check, to do everything that's needed for them to become a provisional. If there were more people that were qualified to do that in every office, then I could just say go to that office or this office. That would be a lot easier.

Participant 04 reported that there is only one worker in the organization who attempts to help foster youth achieve provisional care which could keep foster care youth with

individuals in their family. The participants reported that the same worker who attempts to locate provisional placement also has a caseload of foster care youth. Therefore, in addition to completing background checks, completing paperwork, and other necessary duties to help a child be placed with a family member. Within that specific county in Arkansas, there is only one location for individuals to complete the process to become a provisional placement. There is only one person that is available to complete background check on families and home studies.

Participant 02 agreed with Participant 04's stance on provisional placement and reported that the judge's personal preference also influences provisional placement. Participant 02 stated:

> It wasn't the law preventing the judge. It was that judge's personal preference. We had some judges that would not allow provisional or kinship placements to transpire without going through the courts and getting approval from the courts. That was holding up permanency for the kids or that was holding up the kids being in a family like setting and being around individuals that they know. So they started, that's how policy designed if you were doing a removal on a child and a relative came forward to become a provisional foster parent and they passed all the checks then we could make that placement. But we had a couple of judges that did not want that to occur, that that was holding it up because even though they'd met the initial criteria. The judge would want them to have a full-blown home study, and then you have to wait on all of that because it takes 30 to 45 days. And so here you have this child that's in a foster home placement which is

> creating a problem because then you start having some behavioral problems, some anxiety and things like that when it could've been over here with this relative on day one if not day one, possibly day two to alleviate some of that. So then that's some of the stress and barriers.

Based on Participant 02's response, the judge appeared to have the final decision on foster care youth placement even if criteria were met by the potential provisional placement. She believed that if a child was placed with in a provisional placement then there would be a decrease in behavioral issues experienced by foster care youth who have experience neglect or abuse. Participant 02 reported that when a child is placed in a foster home with unknown individuals versus provisional placement with family, the child develops maladaptive behaviors in response to additional stress. These behaviors create a new barrier to permanent placement.

Impact on the Social Problem

The social problem of the study is out-of-home placement. Out-of-home placement occurs when children are placed into foster care after neglect or abuse (Freitas et al., 2014). When foster care youth experience out-of-home placement, there is a chance that they age out of care without receiving permanent placement (Freitas et al., 2014). Findings from the focus group suggest that challenges such as ineffective interagency communication, unproductive parent education classes, and unhelpful allocation of Division of Children and Family Services monetary resources have influenced family service workers ability to work with foster care youth at a micro practice level during permanency planning process. This section will proceed as follows:

First, the influence of communication challenges will be examined. Second, the influence of monetary resources will be explored. Third, the influence of parental education on out-of-home placement will be discussed.

Communication

Communication within the agency has created a challenge for social workers attempting to help foster care youth experiencing out-of-home placement. The lack of communication described by the participants appear to have created a negative influence on the out-of-home placement process. Participants suggested that after a child is moved into another county communication no longer exist with the previous worker. Research has shown that there is a correlation between caseworker changes and the percentage of foster care youth achieving permanent placement (Murphy, Van Zyl, Collins-Camargo, & Sullivan, 2012). Murphy, Van Zyl, Collins-Camargo, and Sullivan (2012) found that the percentage of achieving permanent placement is lowered after every caseworker change. The chance of achieving permanency decreased from 74.5% to 12.5% after foster care youth received a case worker change. Research suggests that disruptions in casework services, due to changes in family service workers, is associated with the increased rates of foster care drift (Murphy, Van Zyl, Collins-Camargo, & Sullivan, 2012).

Monetary Funding

Based on the participants' statements, there appears to be a need for preventative interventions at the front end of the out-of-home placement process. Participants reported that the Division of Children and Family Services currently uses monetary resources to contract and pay for emergency shelters, contract beds, and foster homes. According to

Field (2004), the existing debate on what is wrong with the allocation of foster care's monetary resources is focused on the lack of flexibility in the federal Title IV-E program. Policy makers protest that Title IV-E reimburse child welfare agencies a percentage of the cost to keep children in out-of-home placement but dismiss reimbursement for preventative interventions to avoid removal from the home. McDonald, Salyers, and Shaver (2004) also suggest that Title IV-E is inflexible and should be altered to promote permanent placement rather than financing foster care services. This ultimately prolongs the out-of-home placement process. Rather than allocating monetary resources into the family to increase stability for reunification, monetary resources are used to pay foster families.

Influence of Parent Education Courses

The participants in the focus group suggested that current parent education courses were not effective. The family service workers reported that there was a need to improve the current parent education courses to teach additional independent skills and provide hands-on training. Research has shown that effective parenting education can alter guardians' attitudes and behaviors, promote protective factors, and lead to positive outcomes for foster youth and their family (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2000). Protective factors include nurturing and attachment, knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development, parenting competencies, parental resilience, social connections, concrete supports for parents, social and emotional competence of children, involvement in positive activities, and other individual skills such as self-regulation and problem solving and relational skills (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2000).

Summary

The focus group explored participants' perception on the research question. There were three broad themes discovered during the coding process. These themes included: ineffective interagency communication, need for improved parent education and training material, and unhelpful allocation of Division of Children and Family Services monetary funding. Participants suggested that social workers at the Division of Children and Family Servicers could decrease foster care drift by doing the following: improving the procedures of communication among workers and other agencies, developing effective parenting courses for biological parents, and allocating monetary resources to develop programs specific for foster care youth and their families.

Section 4 of the document will conclude this project and cover the application for professional ethics in social work practice, recommendations for social work practice, and implications for social change.

Section 4: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of social workers' knowledge of challenges that influence foster care drift in the southeastern region of the United States. By understanding the challenges these social workers face during the permanency planning process, interventions can be developed to advance micro social work practice to minimize foster care drift in the southeastern region of the United States. Out-of-home placements happen when a child is placed in a temporary living situation after suffering abuse or neglect in their home (Pecora et al., 2000). Foster care drift is the prolonged period of stay in foster care without obtaining permanent placement (Pecorra et al., 2000). Social workers who engage with foster youth provide many different services such as the provision of case management and permanency planning to foster care youth and their families. Permanency planning is the intervention used in foster care to promote reunification or permanent placement with an adoptive family during out-of-home placement.

The research question of this study focused on challenges that family service workers face when attempting to help foster care youth achieve permanency. A focus group conducted February 4, 2018, at a local Division of Children and Family Services office, provided the opportunity to engage the seven volunteers for 1 hour and 30 minutes. During this focus group, the volunteers discussed their understanding of foster care drift, challenges that influenced their social work practice, and possible solutions to permanency planning issues. I used purposive sampling as the method for recruiting volunteers for this study. The sample population for this study consisted of seven family

service workers employed at the Division of Children and Family Services. All seven participants possessed a social work degree and held the title of family service worker. As stated in Section 3, the family service workers are individuals employed at the Division of Children and Family Services involved in the permanency planning process of foster care youth.

Key findings from the focus group suggest that participants perceived current themes to include ineffective interagency communication, a need for improved parent education and training materials, and unhelpful allocation of Division of Children and Family Services monetary resources. Study participants recommended improving communication among family service workers during case transitions by providing information about known family affiliations to promote provisional care. The study participants also suggested improving communication within the agency by developing an all-encompassing data base system for all Department of Human Services organizations. Regarding the need for improved parent education and training materials, the participants recommended developing courses that focus on independent living skills to promote family stability. Study participants suggested that the Division of Children and Family Service monetary funding should be used to develop programs specifically for foster care youth and their families instead of contract beds and foster care placements.

The data collected could assist the Division of Children and Family Services with the planning and development of permanency planning efforts in the southeastern region of the United States to decrease foster care drift. If the recommended interventions are

successful, this information could be applied to other counties within the state of Arkansas. By spreading awareness of these challenges, social work practice could be changed not only at a micro level, but also on the mezzo and macro level to influence policy changes in the state of Arkansas.

The individuals who will benefit from this research will include current and future foster care youth, biological/adoptive families, and social workers engaged in foster care. Additional research is needed to explore the complex system of foster care to expand knowledge in the social work profession to decrease foster care drift. Section 4 includes a review of the application of the findings for professional ethics in social work practice, and specific recommendations are provided for social work practice. The section concludes with a review of how the findings can promote positive social change.

Application for Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice

In the following section of this document I discuss the social work practice problem and its relation to the NASW Code of Ethics. First, the two principles from the NASW Code of Ethics are presented and applied to out of home placement. Second, I discuss how the NASW Code of Ethics guides micro social work practice in foster care. Third, I present how findings from the study impact social work practice regarding professional ethics.

The NASW Code of Ethics provides a guideline to the professional behavior of the social work profession (NASW, 2017). The NASW Code of Ethics is divided into two sections: values and principals and standards. Regarding this study, I discuss two

values in relation to the social work practice problem of out-of-home placement: the central importance of human relationships and service.

The ethical value of recognizing the central importance of human relationships places emphasis on individuals understanding that the quality of their relationships is important to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of others (NASW, 2017). The findings presented in this research study suggest that lack of effective communication in the Division of Children and Family Services posed challenges for social workers in decreasing foster care drift during out-of-home placement. Participants reported that the lack of communication between different counties lead to the inadequate care to families and foster care youth. If the family service workers were able to build strong relationships with each other, they believed that the gap in communication between counties in the state of Arkansas can be filled. Participants suggested that effective communication will help increase the process of gaining information that could be beneficial to foster care youth in achieving a permanent or a provisional placement. The participants also discussed that there was a need for one database system within the Department of Human Service. This database system would contain information on all individuals who received services from any department or organization under the umbrella of the Department of Human Services. If one database system was created, family services workers would have access to additional information on foster care youth and their families. Enhancing the relationship among the different counties in the state of Arkansas would promote the best outcomes for foster care youth by potentially decreasing foster care drift.

The principle behind the value of service in the Social Work Code of Ethics encourages social workers to focus on helping others in need and addressing the social problem (NASW, 2017). As mentioned earlier, based on the participants' responses there appears to be a lack of communication within the Division and Children of Family Services. The participants reported that there are gaps in communication among workers when foster care youth are transferred from one county to the next. According to the Social Work Code of Ethics (NASW, 2017), it is important that the family service workers are able to put aside their self-interest and use their skills to address the social problem of out-of-home placement. It was suggested that although foster care youth may no longer be on the previous family service worker's caseload, they can provide information that could influence the permanency outcome for that individual.

The outcomes of this study are significant in developing solutions to challenges that are preventing social workers from decreasing foster care drift during out-of-home placement in the southeastern region of the United States. Acquiring a better understanding of the issues and challenges surrounding foster care drift and out-of-home placement allows the family service workers to be more effective in the permanency planning process. The results from this study may have the possibility of being applied to other counties of the Division of Children and Family Services that provide permanency planning to foster care youth throughout the state of Arkansas. Next, I discuss recommendations for social work practice.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

The following section will discuss recommendations for social work practice in the field of foster care as it applies to the southeastern region of the United States. Based on the study findings, I discuss action steps regarding the challenges influencing social work practice as reviewed in Section 3. This section will present a discussion of how the findings from the study influence personal social work practice. Following that, I discuss the usefulness of the key findings to the broader field of social work practice at the mezzo and macro level. Then, I examine the limitations of the study regarding how it may impact the usefulness of the data. Following the discussion of limitations, I examine the need for further research. This section concludes with a recommendation on how the data collected from this study can be disseminated.

Action Steps in Social Work Practice

Participants in the study identified a lack of communication, need for improved parent education and training materials, and allocation of the Division of Children and Family Service funding as challenges for social workers during the permanency planning process. Participants suggested that these challenges should be addressed by increasing communication between counties in the state of Arkansas, developing an all-encompassing data system for the Department of Human Services, developing parent educational classes to focus on independent living skills, and allocating the Division of Children and Family Services monetary resources to promote family stability. At a micro social work practice, applicable changes that can take place within the agency include improving interagency communication, improving education courses to include hands-on

training within the community, and allocating the Division of Children and Family service monetary resources to support family stability.

Action Steps for Communication Issues

Participants reported that interagency communication issues between counties have prevented family service workers from acquiring information pertinent to the permanency of foster care youth. The family service workers stated that if a foster care youth is placed in another county in the state of Arkansas, the previous worker often fails to communicate with the new family service worker. The participants suggested that ineffective communication between workers prevented the current worker from obtaining information that could help the foster care youth obtain a permanent placement. Based on the respondents' statements, ineffective communication between counties appeared to delay the access to information which could have influenced the permanency outcome of the youth in transition. I observed that the participants had a belief that a family service worker in one county may possess the information that could help foster youth obtain a provisional placement within another county.

One worker suggested that a simple solution for this issue would be a phone call between workers during the transition period. The workers reported that when a child is transitioned to another county “all communication is stopped”. Although a minor fix, this small intervention during the transition period could provide the new family service worker access to information that could influence the permanency of foster care youth. I believed that interagency communication can be improved by developing specific documentation that includes needed information during case transitions to increase

communication. The participants reported that the previous family service worker often has access to specific information regarding the foster care youth due to being in the origin location of the foster care youth. This information could include pervious provisional placements or next of kin in the transition area. Although provisional placement is not a permanent placement, it is believed that it may slow down behaviors of foster care youth and placement disruptions. As noted in section 3, improving communication and obtaining targeted and key information from the previous worker could play a vital role in the permanency of foster care youth. A future research study could explore the correlation of permanency and relocation of foster care youth across county lines. A longitudinal study examining one hundred foster care youth and their success of obtaining permanent placement could add additional knowledge of the effectiveness of interagency communication.

Another communication challenge addressed by participants in the focus group was the lack of communication between the Division of Children and Family Services and other organizations under the umbrella of the Department of Humans Services. Currently, family service workers obtain information from other organizations in the Department of Human Services by email. Families who receive services from the Department of Human Services provide other divisions with information that could be beneficial to the Division of Children and Family Services after a child is brought into foster care. Participants believed that the information provided to other divisions in the Department of Human Services could assist with the permanency outcome of foster care youth. This information could include family information such as next of kin, emergency

contacts, addresses, phone numbers, and social security number. The workers believed that the process to obtain information from other division was a tedious process which often lead to a failed attempt to collaborate.

Participants suggested that an all-encompassing database system can be developed to house information from all divisions within the Department of Human Services. This will allow family service workers to obtain information at any time without going through another individual. Completing this action could be an expensive process and would require action on the macro level of practice. All divisions within the Department of Human Services would have to agree to share the protected health or any other confidential information of individuals receiving services from the Department of Human Services. An inexpensive alternative to creating an all-encompassing data base system would be to develop a tracking system within the Department of Human Services. This would allow organizations to be notified of changes in a family system which would promote the transfer of data during collaboration efforts. Title IV-E funds are distributed to child welfare agencies on a yearly basis (Children Bureau, 2012). The family services workers could form a committee to develop a proposal to fund a database system to track foster care youth in Arkansas. The proposal would outline the challenges and advantages of obtaining information on foster care youth and their families. This committee could research what information would be needed in a data tracking system to promote permanency. The committee could also explore the price and functionality of possible database systems such as WyaWorks, FormAssembly, and TrackVia.

Action Steps for Improved Parent Education Courses

According to the participants, parental education and independent living skills for the guardian influence permanency outcomes. The Division of Children and Family Services provide guardians with parent education courses once their child is brought into foster care to promote reunification. However, many of the participants believed that the current classes offered were unproductive. One participant reported that the Division of Children and Family Services might offer support to families in need of services. However, reunification outcomes often failed due to the guardian being unable to be self-sufficient without extreme government support. Based on the respondents' reports, there is a need for improved parent education classes for guardians to learn independent living and parental skills to be self-sufficient and stable enough to provide adequate care to their children. Although monetary stipends may be given to a family, the guardian may not have the skills to or knowledge budget money or pay utilities.

There was not a specific curriculum that was discussed to address the current parent education issue. However, it was suggested that the family service worker providing parent education courses take one Saturday out of the month to provide independent living training within the community. This Saturday training could be a service funded by the Division of Children and Family Service. The trainer could take individuals in the community on trips to pay bills, shop, and cook to build independent living skills so that the guardian could be better equipped to take care of their children. If the hands-on training is effective, it may be beneficial for the workers to find an

evidence-based practice curriculum that combines independent living skills and parent education.

As of now, there is a shortage of programs that combine parent education and independent skills. According to Marcynyszyn, Maher, and Corwin (2011) most community-based agencies in the child welfare system use programs that have not been subjected to evaluation and focus solely on the family as a whole. If the family service workers were unable to find such a curriculum it could be possible for the workers to develop the curriculum after researching what services are needed within their community.

A future study examining the effectiveness of parent education courses and permanency outcomes is needed. A large randomized control trial comparing families who received the current parent education courses and parent education courses with independent living skills would be beneficial. One hundred families could be used in this suggested study. Fifty of the families would receive the suggested parent education training from the focus group while the other fifty could receive the current services provided by the Division of Children and Family Services.

Action Steps for Allocation of the Division of Children and Family Services Monetary Funding

The family service workers discussed monetary funding as a challenge influencing foster care drift. The workers reported that there was a lack of funding for family services and resources after a child was placed in foster care. The participants reported knowing services that could promote family stability and reunification, however,

reported that the Division of Children and Family Services often failed to provide access to families. The participants described these services as drug rehabilitation, intensive outpatient counseling, parenting classes, or independent living classes. Based on the responses from participants organizations within this region can provide services to families experiencing out-of-home placement, however, are not willing to work with the Division of Children and Family Services. The funding issue is developed from the Division of Children and Family Services inability to pay for specialized services due to current policy.

The participant's responses appear to stem from the issue of funding provided on a federal level. Although the participants were not able to name the specific policy influencing funding for foster care, a lot of their addressed funding issues involve Title IV-E funding for foster care. The participants had an awareness of the funding issues for foster care, however, did not know the national policy Title IV-E. The federal government reimburses the Division of Children and Family Services for services provided to foster care youth. However, the monetary resources are focused on paying foster care homes and interventions surrounding out-of-home placement versus services promotion family renunciation (Field, 2004).

One participant suggested that instead of paying contract beds and foster homes $1,200 a month, monetary funds could be given to the family to promote reunification by paying for utilities, rent, and counseling services. This participant believed that developing services to promote family reunification instead of focusing on supporting foster homes would decrease the percentage of youth experiencing foster care drift. A

future study is needed to explore the permanency outcomes of providing families with a monetary stipend. This study could provide additional information on the success of specialized services versus the current services provided by the Division of Children and Family Services. The Division of Children and Family Services could use one hundred families in this suggested study. Fifty of the families would receive a monetary stipend to have access to specialized services, while the other fifty would have access to the current resources provided by the Division of Children and Family Services.

Another participant suggested developing an all-encompassing facility similar to Nevada's Child Haven that provided counseling, juvenile services, and placement for foster care youth. She described this facility as a "one-stop shop" for services when a child enters foster care. This facility would include everything needed for foster youth and their families. The participant believed that such a facility would decrease the cost of contracting emergency shelter beds and foster homes. The participant reported that this facility could mirror the current foster care facility in Nevada.

It is possible for the social workers to assemble a committee to research options on how a facility following this model can be funded. The participant who suggested the idea of the facility reported that a major portion of funding for the facility in Nevada was provided by tennis star Andre Agassi. She suggested engaging possible stakeholders in the Arkansas community such as the Sam Walton family, Don Tyson family, and J.B Hunt family to provide funding. As stated earlier in section 3 and 4, funds distributed under Title IV-E are awarded to agencies to pay for services such as the care and supervision of children in foster care, administrative costs to manage the program,

training of staff and foster care providers, recruitment of foster families, and costs related to the design, implementation and operation of state-wide data collection system (Children Bureau, 2012). Regarding the development of a facility mentioned above, the family services workers could form a committee to develop a proposal requesting funding. The participants suggested obtaining funding through private donors in the state of Arkansas such as Sam Walton family, Don Tyson family, and J.B Hunt family.

Impact on Personal Social Work Practice

It is believed that one of the findings may be applicable to the my social work practice as an advanced practitioner. Currently, I hold the position as a supervisor of care coordination. In this position, I provide supervision for fifteen individuals who provide care coordination services to individuals with Medicaid insurance. The information obtained from this research, allows me to understand possible gaps in services when individuals in this population relocate due to placement challenges and communications issues. It is important to understand that there is a need for strong human relationships among workers in an agency. The findings gained from listening to the issues with interagency communication provides information on potential communication challenges among my employees and family service workers. The impact and influence of communication challenges within an agency is an important factor in any level or field of social work practice. Improving and promoting healthy working relationships among my current employees and family services workers at the Department of Human Services promotes effective communication which creates better outcomes of services to the population.

Findings and the Broader Field of Social Work Practice

According to the data, there was a key finding that could have potential impact on the macro level of social work practice. Participants discussed a need for the reallocation of the Division of Children and Family Services monetary resources to support family stability and preventative interventions. One of the participants stated that she knows what families need before coming into foster care. However, this participant was unable to provide preventative services to the families due to the current funding policies. These preventative services included drug rehabilitation, intensive outpatient counseling, parenting classes, and independent living classes. Participants argued that instead of paying for foster care placements and contract beds, money needed to be reallocated back into the family to fund utilities, rent, and the services mentioned above. The findings from this study suggest that there is a need for policy amendments to promote family reunification and stability instead of out-of-home interventions. The current out-of-home placement policies increase the probability of individuals experiencing foster care drift once they enter out-of-home placement. The workers discussed that the current interventions focus promote out-of-home placement rather than reunification.

Title IV-E is the policy surrounding the allocation of child welfare monetary resources. If the agencies in the southeastern region of the United States were able to justify the need of preventative services at a local level, it is possible that changes could be made on a broader social work practice level. The family service workers could research the correlation of preventatives services and foster care in the southeastern region of the United States and disseminate the findings. If the data display a positive

correlation, it is possible that funding policies could be altered to reallocate funding. Additional research is needed to explore the influence of Title IV-E impact on foster care drift and the out-of-home placement experience.

Limitations

Possible limitations in this study include a threat to external validity, demographics of participants, and feedback from participants. A purposive sampling technique was used which could have prompted the selection bias of participants. There are 75 counties in the state of Arkansas, and only one was chosen to recruit volunteers. There are approximately 430 family service workers across the state of Arkansas. Participants were selected using specific criteria, which included possessing a social work degree and having experience working with foster care youth in the permanency planning process. A sample of seven individuals participated in the focus group. Six of the participants identified as being an African American female and only one individual reported being White. The sample size and demographics of individuals who participated in the focus group makes it impossible to generalize the findings to a larger population.

Limited engagement with the peer debriefers in this study can also be noted as a limitation. Peer debriefers were given forty-eight hours to review the focus group transcript and my reflective journals. During this forty-eight-hour period, the debriefers had the opportunity to contact me via email. After the 48 hours concluded, I held a 30 minute telephone meeting with each peer debriefers to discuss possible themes. The three peer debriefers came to the same conclusion on three common themes, however, peer debriefer 3 reported that parent education and foster care training should be two

separate themes. Peer debriefer 3 reported that parent education appeared to the be discussed more than foster parent training. This theme was accepted by and shared with peer debriefer 1 and 2.

Another limitation of the study was the shortage of feedback from participants. After the data was transcribed, I ran into issues receiving feedback from participants. All seven of the participants reported that the transcribed focus group appeared to be correct during the member checking process. However, only five of the seven participants responded to additional questions. After the fourth round of follow up questions, only 2 participants responded. The social problem and research question were addressed. However, there was a possibility that additional information was missed due to participants' discontinued communication.

Recommendations for Further Research

Along with the aforementioned proposed studies mentioned in recommendations in social work practice**,** there are some areas in which additional research is needed to explore provisional care. This section will explore recommendations for further research. Participants suggested that there is a correlation between provisional placement and permanency. Provisional care is not considered a permanent placement option. However, participants believed that placing foster care youth with someone from a prior relationship decreases the threat of multiple placement disruptions. The family service workers believed that if foster care youth were placed with someone that they had a prior relationship, the possibility of finding a permanent placement would increase. The participants debated that there are multiple challenges preventing provisional placement

from occurring, including the judges' personal preference. The participants believed that the local judges' personal preferences play a vital role in the permanency planning process. Although federal and state policies guide the foster care system, the judges' personal preference impacted permanency outcomes and provisional placement. An additional study analyzing youth in provisional care and permanency outcomes is needed to explore this phenomenon. Another study is needed to examine the correlation of out-of-home placement and judges' personal preferences.

Marcynyszyn, Maher, and Corwin (2011) report that there is little information on the effectiveness of parent education courses and maltreatment. Another future study could explore the permanency outcomes of foster care youth and families that received preventative services such as improved education courses focusing on independent living skills. As mentioned earlier, the participants believed that there was a need for improved parent education courses that included independent living skills to help guardians become self-sufficient. It was suggested that family service workers not only provide parent education courses to guardians but also take them into the community for hands-on learning situations. Additional research is needed to explore the effectiveness of adding an experiential component training for independent living skills to current parent education courses. The social workers need to explore the correlation between improved parent education courses and reunification.

Dissemination of Information

The information obtained in this research study could be shared via different mediums. Dissemination of this information will be achieved in two ways. I will first

discuss findings with the agency to provide awareness of current issues perceived by workers. A PowerPoint will be created, and information will be shared during training with one of the local Division of Children and Family Services. The second way of disseminating findings from this study will be at the next Arkansas chapter of the National Association of Social Worker conference. A poster will be created and displayed during the conference to present findings.

Implication for Social Change

The data acquired in this document has the potential to influence social work practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro level. Social work practice on the micro level can be improved through the permanency planning process utilized by family service workers. Social workers could advance their practice by increasing interagency communication and improving parent education courses to include independent living skills. If the changes made on the micro level of practice are positive in the southeastern region of the United States, it is believed the number of foster care youth experiencing foster care drift would decrease. If these small changes in procedures were proven to be effective on the micro level, the Division of Children and family services might consider altering their allocation of resources to fund central database systems and additional preventative services to promote family stability and effective communication. This would prompt the need to alter policies influencing the funding surrounding foster care drift. Currently, the funding for foster care focuses on out-of-home placement, however preventative interventions for families could decrease the need for foster care services. The possible implication for social change for this study could shift the focus of foster

care services from out-of-home interventions to preventative services to promote family stability.

Conclusion

Reunification is the current goal of the Division of Children and Family Services. However, foster care youth often experience multiple placement disruptions in out-of-home placement which leads to foster care drift (Ryan et al., 2016). Key findings from the study show that participants report three main challenges that influence their ability to decrease foster care drift: ineffective communication, unproductive parent education classes, and unhelpful allocation of Division of Children and Family Services monetary funding. By understanding the challenges that social workers face regarding foster care drift, social workers engaged in foster care should be able to implement effective interventions to improve their micro social work practice in the field of foster care. Participants reported that social workers at the Division of Children and Family Services could decrease foster care drift by doing the following: improving the procedures of communication among workers and other agencies, improving parent education courses to include an independent living skills component, and allocating monetary resources to develop programs specific for foster care youth and their families.

Additional research is needed to examine the relationship between provisional care and permanency outcomes. It is recommended that the social workers continue to monitor their practice in the field of child welfare to decrease foster care drift and improve the experience of individuals in out-of-home placement. If foster care drift were decreased nationwide, there would be an increase in foster youth obtaining a permanent

placement. Foster care youth that obtain permanent placement rather than aging out of foster care are believed to have a greater chance of obtaining the skills to be successful as an individual adult in society (James, 2004).

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Code

IRB approval code: 01-24-18-0535253

Appendix B: E-mail to Agency Director

Hello,

My name is Joey Gardner MSW, LCSW. I am emailing you to make a request to have volunteers from your organization participate in my capstone doctoral project. I am currently working on my Doctorate in Social Work and need to hold a focus group with family service workers that have a social work degree. I know that your department works with a very vulnerable population, so I want to assure you that I will not be collecting data that could harm your organization or the children in foster care. If allowed, I would like to hold a focus group after the department's county meeting during the workers' lunch break. I would be able to provide lunch for the individuals who are willing to stay after the meeting to participate. I ask that you consider my request because this is a vital portion of my dissertation and look forward to working with you. I have flyers and consent forms developed if you would like to look at them. If you need additional information please email me at Joey.Gardner@waldenu.edu or call me XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Thank You,

Joey Gardner MSW, LCSW

Appendix C: Script for Focus Group Discussion

Introduction: Hello everyone, my name is Joey Gardner and this is a focus group on foster care drift. I will conduct and record the following discussion that we are about to have. I will ask you several open ended questions. Your personal opinions and viewpoint is important for this study. There is no wrong answer so do not be ashamed to speak up. Please feel free to express yourself. No names or personal information will be utilized in the report.

The discussion will last for about an hour. I ask that we let everyone have a chance to give their opinion during this discussion as well. You can address each other, because I am only here to assist in the discussion. Is everything clear about how this focus group will go down? Okay great let's start.

Foster care drift is the prolonged period of stay that foster youth spend in foster care without receiving permanent placement. The current goal of the Division and Children of Family Services is to seek family reunification, however this does not always occur. When children's guardians lose their parental rights children they often float around in care until aging out of services. Once this occurs, they lose government assistance and struggle to maintain as an independent adult. The goal of this discussion is to explore your involvement in this process.

Who here has heard of foster care drift?

What do you know about foster care drift?

How can we decrease foster drift in the next year?

How can policies create barriers preventing the decrease in foster drift?

How can interagency collaboration create barriers preventing the decrease in foster drift?

How can collaboration with other agencies or organizations create barriers preventing the decrease of foster drift?

What actions can be taken by the local child welfare agency to address foster drift?

What do you believe can be done?

Have you noticed a difference in foster drift regarding race, gender, or age? How so?

What are the missing factors and barriers influencing foster drift?

What do you believe is difficult to deal with being a field worker?

Where you surprised about foster drift in the community?

What are your experiences on a daily basis as a field family service worker?

What is your experience like working in foster care?

What is your experience regarding supporting factors involved in foster care?

What interventions can be applied to decrease foster care drift?

What can you do as a social worker to improve the situation?

Moving forward, what can the agency do as a whole help aid in decreasing foster drift?

What can other local agencies do to help decrease foster drift?

What can you do as a family service worker?

What can your supervisor assist you with?

What resources are needed?

Alright, we are going to stop right there. I thank you for your time and for participating in this research study. Again, if you have any questions you can always contact

Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire

1) Date of birth:_____
2) Gender
    a. Female
    b. Male
3) Your ethnic and racial background:_____
4) How many years have you been employed with this agency_____
5) Do you have a bachelor degree in social work:
    a. Yes
    b. No
6) Do you have a master degree in social work:
    a. Yes
    b. No
7) Do you hold a social work license?
    a. Yes
    b. No
8) If so, what license do you hold:_____
9) How many years have you worked with children in foster care_____