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Parental Perspectives of Permanency Planning and Staffing Barriers in Child Welfare

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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MSSW, University of Louisville-Kent School of Social Work, 1998

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

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Abstract

Caseworker turnover in child welfare agencies has been a problem for many years. The turnover negatively impacts the agency, and the staff left behind by their departing peers, and continuity of services provided to clients. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore parental experiences with child welfare staff turnover to determine how clients perceived that turnover impacted their child welfare case. The research questions for this study focused on (a) how clients perceived that child welfare turnover impacted their case and (b) how the turnover impacted their case plan and (c) recommendations for child welfare to enhance services. Conceptually, ecological and general systems theories provided the framework for understanding perceptions of child welfare clients' experiences. Data were collected using semistructured questions administered to the 8 former child welfare clients in individual interviews. The participants were recruited through purposeful and snowball sampling. The selection criteria for participants were previous clients who had experienced the loss of their caseworker at least 3 times due to turnover. The collected data were transcribed verbatim from an audio recording. Codes were assigned to the data and reliability checks were conducted. The themes that emerged from analysis of the data included (a) effect of turnover on the outcome of the case, (b) loss that comes with turnover, (c) different perspectives, (d) frustration with notification of change, (e) case plan changes, and (f) advice for child welfare agencies. The knowledge gained from this study can help child welfare agencies learn how clients are affected by turnover and what families need from the child welfare agency when facing turnover. The findings of this study could potentially contribute to positive social change by providing guidance for practice and a greater opportunity to help families who experience staff turnover in child welfare agencies.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to child welfare clients and staff. I am hopeful that this research has a positive impact on child welfare services and the climate and culture within child welfare agencies.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge the many people that supported this study and walked with me along this journey. First, I would like to thank fabulous managers and administrators in the child welfare system that were there for me at the beginning of this journey. Former commissioner Theresa James, Grace Akers, and Rachel Hodnett embraced and supported my research from the start.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Nationally, child welfare agencies investigated reports of abuse and neglect for over 3 million child victims in 2014 (Administration for Children and Families, 2015). Many of these victims were removed from their families and ended up in the foster care system. The number of children in foster care across the country rose to approximately 415,000 children in 2014 (author, year). Although child welfare workers, referred to in this research as caseworkers, worked with these children, they also worked with their family members.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA, 1997) mandated that child welfare agencies work with families to assist them in prompt reunification with their children. However, many barriers to achieving this goal, such as systemic factors in the child welfare agency itself or in the family, exist for these families and their children. In terms of child welfare, staff turnover results in hardship for the agency, staff, administration, and clients (Collins-Camargo, Ellett, & Lester, 2012; Flower, McDonald, & Sumski, 2005; Shim, 2014; Skoog, Khoo, & Nygren, 2015; Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, & Trinkle, 2010; Tripp et al., 2014). As with many organizations, child welfare agencies struggle to provide and maintain quality services to their clients, despite the loss of knowledge that departing staff take with them. The inevitable outcome of turnover is increased caseloads for those caseworkers who remain (Collins-Camargo et al., 2012).

During periods of staff turnover, families struggle with uncertainty and inconsistency in their case management, which can result in delays in permanency and failed reunification attempts. Turnover and the delays in permanency can engender

parental feelings of fear and distrust of the child welfare system. This distrust is problematic, as Schofield et al. (2011) found that parents need to feel that they can communicate openly and honestly with their child's caseworker.

The caseworker-client relationship is similar to most relationships, in that open communication and trust are relationship foundations nurtured over time. Regarding youth in foster care, Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2010) found that when faced with a change in their caseworker, youth who had multiple caseworkers believed that they lacked stability and lost trusting relationships. This distrust can be a barrier to successful negotiation and follow-up of a family case plan, including objectives and tasks for parents or a permanency plan with objectives and tasks for the youth, agency staff, and caregivers of the children (Schofield et al., 2011; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010). These plans are a family road map to navigating the child welfare system. The plan typically includes orders from the court for the family members, as well as services to help the family address the issues, resulting in agency involvement (Gladstone et al., 2012). Parental failure to complete the tasks and objectives of the case plan can result in (a) delays in reunification, (b) termination of parental rights, or (c) the permanent legal severing of the parent-child relationship.

Many parents experience problems with the tasks and objectives in their case plans, as they often have to attend a variety of weekly appointments (D'Andrade & Chambers, 2012). Lack of family member engagement in the case planning process results in a plan that lacks family commitment or ownership (Crea & Berzin, 2009). Landsman and Boel-Studt (2011) found that more contact among the caseworkers, the

child, and extended family members resulted in a higher likelihood of reunification or permanency for the child or children in foster care.

Throughout Chapter 1 of this study, I examine historical information related to the study, define the research problem, and clarify the purpose of the study. Additionally, I provide the research questions and address the nature of the study and its theoretical framework. I include a definition of terms used in this chapter, and I discuss the significance of the research. I conclude the chapter with assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

Background of the Study

Kentucky (KY) the research site for the study, had 7,921 children in foster care as of September 4, 2016 (KY, 2016a). The statewide average length of stay in foster care for this population is 22.8 months (KY, 2016a). The child welfare agency in Kentucky is a state-directed agency. The agency divided the state into nine geographic service regions, with each service region having its own dynamic environment, based on the population of the geographic area as well as its resources. Service regions face unique challenges. The focus of this research was on two service regions with more than 2,100 children in out-of-home care (KY, 2016b; KY, 2016c). The average length of time in foster care for children for these two regions was above 23 months (KY, 2016b; KY, 2016c). Both areas have struggled with caseworker turnover.

One of the regions studied was Jefferson County in Louisville. Jefferson County is the largest metropolitan area in the state. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), Jefferson County has a population of 763,623. In contrast, the other area studied is a part

of the Northern Bluegrass area, which is a tri-county area with a combined population of 384,790 (author, year). The two study areas both have a significant history of caseworker turnover and sought assistance with case management tasks from other service regions due to critical staff shortages during the last 2 years. The two areas share a border with another state and have large universities located within their boundaries. Many staff who left their child welfare positions went to major insurance companies or local schools to do case management or social work in those fields. Both the school systems and the insurance companies typically pay the former caseworkers more money and have (a) better benefits, (b) opportunities for advancement, and (c) a less stressful work environment.

On a national level, hundreds of thousands of children move through the child welfare system at any given time (Administration for Children and Families, 2015). These children and their families must navigate their way through the child welfare system to find a resolution to the issues that brought the family to the attention of the agency. When things go smoothly, the children can return to their home of origin. However, according to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), over 100,000 child clients are waiting for adoption, with an additional 50,000 adopted during that year (Administration for Children and Families, 2015).

Often, these children and families lose their familial relationships due to an inability to reunify the family. What is at stake for these families is important. Child welfare agencies are responsible for working to ensure that the children and families receive the services necessary to facilitate reunification.

Balsells et al. (2013) outlined the necessary factors in successful reunification, including parental awareness of the problem or issues, as well as awareness of what it will take to resolve the problems. This understanding facilitates the engagement process between the child welfare agency and the parents in developing an understanding of the family, as well as the need of the family to change. However, this understanding comes from clear and ongoing communication between the family and the caseworker. Pecora et al. (2013) studied positive communication between child welfare agency staff and families in a California program to help families build awareness and collaboration in reunification by the use of regular, intense family team meetings with family members and providers. This work brought about a positive outcome while identifying a deficit in communication with the families' caseworkers. Participants reported frustration resulting from the lack of communication with their caseworker (Pecora et al.).

Augsberger and Swenson (2015) found that youth in foster care wanted transparency and nonjudgmental interactions with their caseworker. Youth wanted to feel comfortable sharing information and needed to feel accepted by their caseworker. Youth struggled building trust with their new worker when their previous worker left the agency (author, year). One particular youth stated that they had given up trying to develop a relationship with their caseworker, as they had over six caseworkers in a short period (author, year). Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2010) claimed that youth facing child welfare turnover lacked stability and lost trusting relationships. Schofield et al. (2011) found that this lack of trust was a barrier for them to work together collaboratively. Working together is important.

According to Flower et al. (2005), children in foster care have delays in permanency due to changes in their caseworker. The consequences included longer stays in foster care for the children. Jackson, O'Brien, and Pecora (2011) found that families with children who experienced longer stays in care had a greater number of placement changes. More placement changes brought about a greater possibility of (a) further abuse while the children are in foster care and (b) emotional response of the parents and the children to the separation of the family.

Understanding the effect of staff turnover on youth in care and their parents is essential to reduce the barriers in the process. This knowledge enables child welfare agency staff to help clients make transitions more smoothly to their new caseworker. With this knowledge not available in the literature, it is unclear what effect staff turnover has on parents, as well as what parents need from the child welfare agency when facing staff turnover.

Statement of the Problem

Staff turnover in child welfare agencies negatively affects families and children in care. Staff turnover brought about delays in permanency for children (Flower et al., 2005), longer stays and multiple moves in foster care (Jackson et al., 2011), and instability for clients of the agency (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010). Changes in the caseworker have also been found to lead to distrust of the caseworker and a breach in the caseworker-family relationship, a problem that affects families and children served by these agencies (Jackson et al., 2011; Schofield et al., 2011; Strolin-Goltzman et al.,

2010). However, what is unknown is how staff turnover has affected the day-to-day life experiences of families with children in foster care.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences child welfare parents/clients had with the turnover of their caseworkers. The two focal points of the inquiry were (a) how these parents perceive their experiences affected their ongoing case and their permanency plan and (b) what parents with children in foster care need from the child welfare agency when facing staff turnover. Although researchers have studied the effects of turnover on staff and children in care, a gap exists in the literature on how clients perceive the effects of staff turnover, as well as what clients need from the child welfare agency, when facing turnover.

The objectives in conducting this study were to add knowledge to this area by

1. Analyzing the stories of former child welfare parents/clients to develop an understanding of their experiences with the child welfare agency

2. Investigating how the former child welfare parents'/clients' experiences affected their engagement with the agency

3. Exploring how the turnover affected the case planning process and family engagement for their former child welfare case

4. Discovering what suggestions former child welfare parents/clients have that could have improved the caseworker/agency/client/family relationship and engagement

In this study, I focused on child welfare clients with closed cases who have experienced multiple instances of ongoing caseworker turnover. I explored what

experiences former child welfare parents/clients had with the turnover of their

caseworker. Additionally, I explored how these parents perceived their experiences

affected their ongoing case and their permanency plan. Finally, I explored what parents

with children in foster care needed from the child welfare agency when they faced staff

turnover was explored. Studying this population helps to build an understanding of client

perceptions and needs, which is critical in engaging clients and enhancing clients'

experiences with child welfare agencies (Featherstone & Fraser, 2012; Schofield et al.,

2011; Trotter, 2008). Enhancing the experience could result in better outcomes for

children and families and greater satisfaction for child welfare clients.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study included

Research Question 1: How did former child welfare clients perceive the loss of

their ongoing caseworker affected their case?

Research Question 2: How did former child welfare clients perceive the loss of

their ongoing caseworker affected their case plan?

Research Question 3: What can child welfare agencies do for child welfare clients

to make the transition from one ongoing caseworker to another easier?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework to guide this study was a combination of ecological

and general systems theory. Throughout this study, I applied these theories to explore

how the systems within and outside a child welfare agency can affect the work of the

agency with the client, as well as the client with the agency. Systems theory involves

examination of the individual parts within an entire system to determine how the parts of a system can affect the entire system (Mele, Pels, & Polese, 2010). Ecological systems theory or the theory of the individual in the environment comes from general systems theory. Bronfenbrenner developed ecological systems theory as a way of providing a conceptualization of how each person is a part of a system, which surrounds them with various systems in their environment (as cited in Kamenopoulou, 2016). Within a child welfare system, as with any organization, each section of the organization is a small part that combines with others to make up the whole system.

Using general systems theory involves an examination of (a) how the parts of the systems interact with each other and (b) how each affects the entire system (Mele et al., 2010). Interactions among the parts of the system can bring about both negative and positive experiences. The perceptions of those within the system can define the experience of existing in the system through basic qualitative research. The elements that make up a system can include the people and the practices of an agency.

Ecological systems describe individuals in their environment in terms of their microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Kamenopoulou, 2016). The microsystem includes individuals in their immediate environment and those with whom they interact daily. The mesosystem includes the family system, as well as agencies with whom individuals engage as a part of their daily existence. The exosystem includes those who influence the individual indirectly, such as government, or lawmakers.

In the case of the child welfare system, the people who make up the system include the management, supervisors, frontline workers, and support staff (Kamenopoulou, 2016). Practices of the agency that become a part of the system include both the written and unwritten rules of the agency, as well as laws governing the system. Each child welfare agency is a small piece of the larger child welfare system, including government, lawmakers, court systems, community advocates, and the public. Each of these parts of the larger system affects the smaller agency system. An individual child welfare system is not a separate unit, as it must interact with other systems to function. Caseworkers interact with families, local courts, various community partners, and the internal child welfare system of their agency, as well as its larger component. Changes within any part of the system with which caseworkers deal daily can bring about difficulties in the homeostasis or stability of the agency.

Loss of caseworkers as the result of staff turnover can affect the child welfare system and the systems that work with it. Although each vacancy may only appear to affect one small part of the system, this event has a residual or ripple effect on the entire system. Factors within the system are important to highlight when investigating the challenges faced by its clients and staff. When applying the general and ecological system to a child welfare family, experiences and actions often affect other family members' lives. For example, the parent or child's actions could result in the removal of a child from the home or one parent having to leave home, based on those actions. However, these actions could also affect the larger system, or extended family who may take placement of a relative or allow an adult family member to move in with them due to

orders from the court. This splitting of the family can also change other systems in the family's system, such as school, church, or neighborhood. The family interacts with the child welfare system, as well as the exosystem of laws and rules governing child welfare agency, and the foster care system. Court systems shape family case planning in the context of the system of laws, such as the ASFA (1997), which mandated the child welfare agency to seek permanency for children in foster care for a period of 15 out of 22 months.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, I used a basic qualitative approach to explore parental perspectives of how former child welfare clients perceive caseworker turnover during the planning process. In-depth, semistructured interviews with former parents of children in foster care who experienced changes in their staffing provided the data about parental perspectives of those facing this situation. I analyzed the data in thematic clusters, verbatim examples, and descriptions of the experiences of the participants. Data collected included (a) the number of caseworkers clients had after the investigation, (b) how they received notice of each new caseworker, (c) how effectively they communicated with the new worker, and (d) what changes occurred in their cases or their case plan once they received a new caseworker.

Definitions

Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA): Federal law to promote child/children placed in foster care by having a permanency plan in place and a timely placement. Child welfare agency must take into consideration the safety and wellbeing

of the children while in foster care. This law mandates a 15- to 22-month period for the child welfare agency to investigate and implement a plan, giving courts and child welfare agencies guidelines when a goal change is appropriate or an alternative to the goal of return to a parent (ASFA, 1997).

Child welfare agency: The agency working to ensure that children achieve safety, permanency, and wellbeing. These agencies investigate reports of maltreatment of children to determine if abuse, neglect, or dependency occurred in the family. With a positive determination that these conditions exist, the agency develops a case plan for the family with an outline of tasks and objectives to provide or arranges services to assist the family in addressing the conditions that brought the family to the attention of the agency. The services can include referrals for counseling, substance abuse treatment, or parenting training, as well as arranging for the placement of the children, either with relatives or in foster care. Families with children removed from the home receive services to (a) work toward reunification with the family or (b) assist the child to permanency (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012). For the purposes of this research, the child welfare agency will be referred to as the agency.

Child welfare client: Current or former individuals who are working with or have worked with the child welfare system. For the purposes of this research, child welfare clients will be referred to as the client. Additionally, I focused on the parents of children who were removed from their care.

Child welfare worker or caseworker: The caseworker assigned to work with a family on their child welfare case. This study's focus was primarily on the ongoing

worker for the family, rather than the initial caseworker who did the investigation. The former work with the family after the investigative worker makes a finding, and the case is assigned for ongoing services. For the purposes of this research, this individual will be referred to as the caseworker.

Foster care/out-of-home care/in care: Foster care, commonly called out-of-home care (OOHC), involves the temporary placement of children removed from their homes by a child welfare agency because of abuse, neglect, or dependency in their home of origin. The placement of these children can be in several different levels of care, including basic foster care, group homes, residential placement facilities, emergency shelters, or independent living programs (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

Permanency plan/case plan: The permanency plan includes a child's goal for permanency with time-limited, goal-oriented tasks and activities to maintain or return children with their family of origin, if possible. Permanency plans have tasks required to achieve the goal and the roles and responsibilities of all involved. If returning a child to the family is not possible, the caseworker makes alternative plans to assist the child by placement with other permanent families (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014).

Assumptions

1. The participants shared common experiences with child welfare turnover.

2. The participants were forthcoming with their descriptions of their experiences with the child welfare agency and the turnover of their caseworker.

3. Every individual's experience was unique to their situation, family, and case.

4. Given the criteria for inclusion in the study and the similar nature of the parental experiences, the participants had experienced similar situations while working with the agency staff.

5. The participants in the study agreed to participate to have their voices heard by sharing their experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

Scope

The scope of this study involved former child welfare parents who had children in foster care and also experienced staff turnover of their caseworker in Kentucky. A variety of case types present themselves within the child welfare system. Some families experience an investigation and closure of their case. Others have their children removed and placed with relatives. These clients did not meet the selection criteria for this research, as the intent was to explore how the placement of their children in foster care affected families.

One of the primary research sites was Louisville, KY, which is a major metropolitan community. The other research site was a three-county area comprised of Boone, Kenton, and Campbell counties. Both areas have a mix of rural and urban areas in their communities. Participants included former child welfare clients who had children in foster care and had faced caseworker turnover.

Delimitations

Families with children in foster care, as opposed to relative placement, typically have greater restrictions placed between them and their children. Additionally, these

parents experience the possibility of termination of parental rights due to laws regarding permanency. Parents with children in foster care face a greater sense of urgency due to timeframes established by the ASFA (1997). Exploring the experiences of how changes in case workers affected families provides child welfare agencies and practitioners working with these clients' insight into the experiences of these parents.

Limitations

Qualitative research involves the exploration of an experience, phenomenon, problem, or issue from the perspective of those who have life experiences with the topic (Kornbluh, 2015). The qualitative research purpose is to develop an understanding of an experience and the meanings that people attach to their experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Furthermore, although qualitative researchers do not establish cause and effect, I explored participants' perceptions.

These participants had their interpretation of how child welfare turnover may have affected their families. These interpretations are significant but may be exaggerated or minimized, as they portray the perspectives and life experiences of the participants. To counter the effects of either type of response, during the interviews I asked participants to elaborate on the details of their experiences so that I had a view of what they experienced. At the beginning and during the interviews, where necessary, I assured the participants of the confidentiality of their responses. I asked them to provide a pseudonym for their data. I aggregated the data so that no one case and its details were easily identifiable. I explained my formal role in the field of child welfare and informed the participants that I had no current interactions with the child welfare staff in their

communities. I explained that my motivation was to make services better for child welfare clients.

The sample size of this study included eight child welfare clients. Regardless of whether participants resided in rural or urban areas, the general feelings and emotions of having had their children placed in foster care were consistent with families living in both types of geographic areas. Because the research involved families with closed cases, participants' experiences occurred in the past. Participants with current open cases may have clearer memories of their experiences. Furthermore, the one-time opportunity for participants provided a limit to the study that would not be present in research completed longitudinally. Longitudinal research would provide information related to how things changed over time.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore client perspectives of the effect on their families and children of staff turnover in the child welfare agency. Gaining insight into the perspectives of the consumers of services provided a clearer understanding of the effect turnover had on families. Additionally, from child welfare agency perspectives, administrators can learn what their agencies could do to help families when turnover occurs. Exploring the effect that staff turnover has on families may bring about organizational change for agencies, leading to greater stability in the child welfare workforce.

A gap in the research exists regarding the best way to transition a family from one caseworker to another when child welfare agencies face staff turnover. This finding is

consistent with my literature review of the knowledge area. The implications for positive social change from this research include a better understanding of what effects staff turnover has on families, as well as what child welfare agencies can do to minimize its negative effects. Minimizing the negative effects provides a greater opportunity for family and agency engagement, as well as enhanced familial success for families involved with the child welfare agency.

The knowledge gained from this study can inform practice for child welfare agencies and child welfare staff. It has the potential to bring about a better outcome for the families and children served by the agency. Knowing the barriers to engagement between caseworkers and clients and understanding the engagement process between these parties can lead to interventions that might reduce the consequences of such barriers.

Significance to Practice

Child welfare agencies, as well as clients of the agencies, can benefit from this research by taking the results and developing better means to address staff turnover. The better prepared or equipped these agencies are to address staff turnover, the greater advantage parents will have in maneuvering this change. The results will provide new knowledge on how families respond to and cope with this turnover.

Future child welfare clients need every chance to be successful in their work with the agency because families who are unsuccessful stand to lose custody of their children permanently. Parents of the 415,000 children in foster care need and deserve to have every chance for reunification. Child welfare agencies can improve this chance by

ensuring parents get what they need when faced with turnover (Administration for Children and Families, 2015).

Significance to Theory

Jackson et al. (2011) discovered that families who have children with extended stays in foster care become traumatized due to frequent placement changes, maltreatment in foster care, and emotional responses to their stay in foster care. Understanding how to help families and children cope with turnover may help to alleviate some of its adverse effects. Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2010) also found that children in the foster care system who experience a change in their caseworker feel a sense of instability.

The results may also have indirect benefits for children in care by reducing any trauma experiences, reducing maltreatment, increasing stability, and decreasing the emotional impact of removal from the home and into an agency's care. The findings provide theoretical backing for the use of an ecological and systems framework to understand the process and its effects. Also, the results pinpoint areas in the process that need adjustment or modification to improve transitions from worker to worker.

Significance to Social Change

The implications for positive social change from this research include a better understanding of what services and practices child welfare agencies can initiate to minimize negative effects of staff turnover for families. This minimization has the potential to enhance familial success for those with children in foster care. Additionally, understanding how to best handle the transition is a way to provide a higher quality of

services to clients in an environment where they feel respected and valued. Because both families and children can experience negative outcomes from their children's stay and movement in foster care (Jackson et al., 2011; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010), revisiting policy regarding handling transfers of caseworkers for child welfare families can bring about better outcomes for the agencies, as well as the families.

Summary and Transition

The purpose of this chapter was to explore client perspectives of staff turnover in child welfare agencies. In this basic qualitative approach to the study, I focused on the issue of staff turnover and the effects on permanency planning. Parents with children who were former clients with child welfare services were participants, and their responses were the units of analysis. The conceptual framework for the research was combined ecological and general systems theory.

The child welfare agency is a system in itself. However, it is also a small part of the greater child welfare system. Children and parents working with the child welfare system are a microsystem; they interact with the local child welfare system, as well as the exosystem, or the system of laws, rules, and regulations that affects the family's case. Parents who work with child welfare agency systems must work with entities both inside and outside the system.

The focus of this research was on how the high level of staff turnover in the child welfare system affects the clients served. High turnover rates in child welfare agencies have negative effects for the agency, staff, and clients served by the agency (Collins-Camargo et al., 2012; Flower et al., 2005; Shim, 2010; Skoog et al., 2015; Strolin-

Goltzman et al., 2010; Tripp et al., 2014). I explored how former consumers of the child

welfare system perceive how staff turnover affected them and their families, by listening

to the experiences and perspectives of former child welfare clients who were involved in

the system.

Chapter 2 is an exploration of the literature that supports the purpose of this study,

as well as a documentation of the appropriateness of the methodology chosen for this

research. Chapter 3 provides information about the methods of the study, as well as

justification and explanation of the basic qualitative design used in this study. Chapter 4

includes the results of the study. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results, including

recommendations for further research and implications for positive social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to (a) explore parental perspectives of permanency planning and staffing barriers experienced by families who received services from child welfare agencies and (b) determine what families need from the agency when they are facing the loss of their caseworker. This chapter is a discussion of the literature on staff turnover, including the causes and the effects on child welfare agencies and children in foster care. Issues explored include the climate and culture of child welfare agencies and how staff turnover in child welfare agencies can affect children in foster care.

Literature Search Strategy

The following databases were useful to search the literature: ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Google Scholar, Psych Articles, Psyc INFO, SOC Index, Sage Premier, and Thoreau. The sources for the search were the Walden University Library, as well as governmental and non-profit agency websites. A major website for child welfare information included the Child Welfare Information Gateway, which is a website managed by the Children's Bureau. This site is a governmental website with a wealth of resources on the topic.

The keywords for the search included the following: *child welfare, child welfare turnover, staff turnover, foster care, organizational climate, organizational culture, supervision, child protective services, social work, case managers, caseworkers, parents, parental rights, burnout, social work*, and *turnover*. The focus of the searches included looking for peer-reviewed literature, dissertations, and journal articles written within the

past 5 years. In searching the literature, a review of reference lists provided further resources on similar topics.

This chapter begins with Part 1, a review of systems theory, the conceptual framework for this research, and the methodological considerations for the study. After the conceptual framework, Part 2 covers methodological considerations in terms of the study. Part 3 is a review of the history of child welfare staff turnover, including variables related to turnover, agency, climate, and culture. Part 4 is a discussion of the effects of staff turnover from the perspective of the agency, the staff, and youth in foster care and parents with children in foster care. An overview concludes the chapter, followed by an introduction to Chapter 3.

Conceptual Framework

The framework for exploring the effect of child welfare staff turnover was that of ecological and general systems theory. Each family is a system wherein each family member is a small part of the whole family system (Patterson, 2014). Interactions and actions within and outside the family system come from the exchange of thoughts and ideas within the system. The basis of each family member's functioning and interactions is in a hierarchical order, affecting the other members. However, the interactions of the family are on behalf of the whole system, not necessarily an individual family member. When one family member has a negative interaction or experience, the entire family becomes affected.

Ecological systems theory involves conceptualization of how individuals experience their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Kamenopoulou, 2016;

Lietz, 2011; Patterson, 2014). It provides a means to conceptualize how individuals are a small part of a more extensive system or the other systems in their environment. Individuals in their natural or immediate environments constitute a microsystem. As individuals branch out to interact with other systems, they feel the effects of the macrosystem, chronosystem, mesosystem, and exosystem. Individuals can draw support from their systems, as they do with their family in their mesosystem. However, the mesosystem can also put a strain on individuals if the family system is not running smoothly.

The exosystem and the chronosystem also can cause stress for individuals, as these systems include government and lawmakers, as well as rules and laws that the individual must follow (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Kamenopoulou, 2016). Some of these rules, laws, and court systems affect families when it comes to their work with child welfare agencies. The family must learn to maneuver through the various systems and follow the written and unwritten rules for each system.

Family systems are not isolated because of their interactions with other systems (Patterson, 2014). Families interact with a variety of systems daily. The families in this research have experienced interactions with social services or the child welfare system. Changes within the child welfare system can bring about difficulties in the family system's development of homeostasis or stability. Multiple changes in a family's caseworker bring about a variety of challenges. Although each challenge may only appear to affect one family member, because the family is a system, the challenge has a residual effect on other family members.

The role of family resilience is important in child welfare cases (Walsh, 2016). From an ecological systems theory, child welfare agencies work across the many systems with which the family becomes involved. Work between the child welfare agency, the caseworker, and the parents is significant and should include the many systems crossed by the family before involvement with the agency. By doing so, the caseworker helps the family be more successful after the intervention. Services provided to clients need coordination because these systems constitute natural supports for the client after involvement with the child welfare agency (Walsh, 2016).

Methodological Considerations

Primary qualitative approaches to explore how child welfare consumers view or evaluate the services they receive include basic inquiry and case studies. Researchers conducted descriptive studies in the form of open-ended individual interviews, as well as focus groups, to explore the experiences of child welfare clients. Qualitative research methods are effective when exploring consumer responses to child welfare services.

Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2010) used focus groups to explore the lived experiences of youth in foster care who faced staff turnover of their caseworker. This study was the first qualitative research on child welfare staff turnover from a consumer's perspective. The youth involved in the study explained how child welfare staff turnover affected them as foster children.

Attachment of foster children was also a variable explored with qualitative research (Bîrneanu, 2014). In the study by Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2010), 92 foster children participated in structured interviews in their foster homes to explore the

attachment of foster children to their substitute parents. Their experiences of instability in their previous relationships with caregivers caused children in foster placements to struggle to develop a secure attachment with their substitute parents (Bîrneanu).

Schofield et al. (2011) conducted phenomenological research to explore the perspectives of parents with children in foster care through the use of individual interviews and focus groups. The study resulted in a brief narrative from the parents. The parents described how the loss of their children affected them emotionally, as well as what the parents needed from their caseworker (Schofield et al.).

Featherstone and Fraser (2012) used a qualitative case study to explore the relationship between child welfare parents/consumers and child welfare agencies. Featherstone and Fraser explored how advocates helped consumers become empowered and supported as they maneuvered the child welfare services. The case study included basic information about the participants, while also allowing the reader to develop insight into the parental perspective of working within the child welfare system through the use of narratives (Featherstone & Fraser). The case study process involved an exploration of what the consumers experience with full, rich descriptions of the experiences of the participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

The basic qualitative approach is a good fit to explore how former child welfare families experienced and coped with staff turnover in child welfare agencies. A basic qualitative research approach enables researchers to explore participants' common yet shared experiences. Researchers conducting qualitative research have the opportunity to learn about the experiences of those parents who experienced caseworker turnover

(Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Moser & Korstjens, 2017). This approach involved the completion of interviews to learn about participants' experiences with their child welfare case and how they perceived staff turnover affected their cases. Their words and their experiences will allow others to understand their own experiences. By using a basic qualitative approach, participants can help others understand how the child welfare system affected their lives and how they managed events of transition when facing the assignment of a new caseworker.

History of Staff Turnover in Child Welfare Agencies

Historically, staff turnover has been a problem in child welfare agencies (General Accounting Office [GAO], 2003). Adjustments within child welfare agencies involve changes made by staff members or changes made by child welfare agency managers. Although transfers and resignations occur in different ways, both affect clients and the child welfare agency. Adjustments in staffing or transfers do not typically count in the calculation of turnover rates by child welfare agencies.

The General Accounting Office (GAO, 2003) found that (a) national turnover rates in child welfare were 30-40% and (b) new employees stayed on the job for an average of 2 years. Although no more recent national data are available, several states tracked their staff turnover individually. The latest published data regarding turnover rates came from South Carolina, where turnover rates were 65% during the period from 2011 to 2013 (Self, 2014).

Clark (2012) examined turnover in the state of California and discovered a rate of 7.1% for workers leaving the child welfare field. California was one state that did

include staff adjustments or transfers of staff in their turnover data (Clark, 2012). In 2011, 12.7% of the California frontline workers moved to other positions, both inside and outside the agency (Clark, 2012). In 2014, turnover rates in some parts of Florida were up to 80%, with the entire state's average turnover reaching 37% (Florida, 2014). Texas is another state that has struggled with staff turnover in its child welfare system, as Tripp et al. (2014) reported. The state-wide caseworker turnover rate for Texas was 32% in 2013, with some areas in Texas having rates higher than 40% (Tripp et al).

Factors Related to Child Welfare Staff Turnover

Researchers explored staff turnover from a variety of perspectives. Scholars (Drake & Yadama, 1996; Faller, Grabarek, & Ortega, 2010; McGowan, Auerbach, & Strolin-Goltzman, 2009; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001, Mor Barak et al., 2006; Stalker, Mandell, Fensch, Harvey, & Wright, 2007; Strand & Dore, 2009; Zosky, 2010) studied the causes of staff turnover to develop an understanding of caseworkers' motives behind their desire to leave the field. Collectively, researchers identified several trends that resulted in the intention to leave the field of child welfare, including issues with the size of the caseload, or workload; agency practices, particularly with bureaucratic and punitive practices; dissatisfaction with promotional opportunities or salaries; poor organizational support or fairness; and challenging work-life balance. These factors contributed to caseworker intention to leave the field.

Other researchers (Aguiniga, Madden, Faulkner, & Salehin, 2013; Chen, Park, & Park, 2012; Schweitzer, Chianello, & Kothari, 2013) focused on how compensation and opportunities for advancement affected turnover for child welfare staff. Particular issues

involved financial compensation, benefits, and opportunities for professional growth by providing professional supervision opportunities. These enhanced opportunities could bring about greater opportunities for staff and the potential for enhanced services for clients.

Middleton and Potter (2015) explored the relationship between vicarious trauma and caseworker turnover. Vicarious or secondary trauma involves caseworkers' day-to-day experiences of exposure to the trauma of others, as well as exposure to traumatic pictures, videos, and reports. The physical and sexual abuse cases can take an emotional toll on caseworkers (Middleton & Potter). The constant exposure to trauma, traumatic experiences, and traumatic materials can leave caseworkers wanting to leave the field because the emotional toll can permeate into their personal lives.

Staff with a low level of satisfaction with their role in child welfare, as well as dissatisfaction with the demands of paperwork responsibilities, result in staff planning to leave the field. Satisfaction with financial compensation was a minimal factor in child welfare staff intending to leave the field (Middleton & Potter, 2015). However, Schweitzer et al. (2013) found that financial compensation was a factor in dissatisfaction among social workers. Researchers (Auerbach, McGowan, Augsberger, Strolin-Goltzman, & Schudrich, 2010) found that the lower level of pay often seen among child welfare agencies increased an employee's desire to leave the field.

Agency Culture and Climate

Investigators (Collins-Camargo et al., 2012; Hwang & Hopkins, 2012; Lee, Forster, & Rehner, 2011; Shim, 2014; Spath, Strand, & Bosco-Ruggiero, 2013; Tsai,

2011; Westbrook, Ellett, & Asberg, 2012) used a theoretical framework of positive organizational culture and its effects on turnover and the quality of services. Retention in child welfare agencies improves when workers can be involved and have input into agency decisions (Clark, Smith, & Uota, 2013; Johnco, Salloum, Olson, & Edwards, 2014). Supervisory support helps caseworkers deal with work-life conflicts and burnout issues (Lizano, Hsiao, Mor Barak, & Casper, 2014).

A component of organizational culture is the relationship between management behaviors and how the practices of management affect job satisfaction within an agency (Mandell, Stalker, Wright, Frensch, & Harvey, 2013; Shim, 2014; Tsai, 2011). Researchers found that the behavior of managers played a role in how staff (a) perceived the culture and climate of the organization and (b) felt about the work that they did within the agency (Mandell et al., 2013; Tsai, 2011; Westbrook et al., 2012). When staff was happier or more satisfied with their work, they were more likely to remain with the agency and provide stability to the clients served by the child welfare office (Lee et al., 2011; Shim, 2014; Tsai, 2011; Westbrook et al., 2012).

Stability of staff is a component of a positive organizational culture and climate (Westbrook et al., 2012). Körner, Wirtz, Bengel, and Görita (2015) explored organizational culture to determine its role in job satisfaction. Körner et al. used structural analysis with a formula involving organizational culture as input (input=I), intra-professional teamwork (process=P), and job satisfaction (output=O). This IPO model was the means to determine the association between and among the three factors. The study involved surveys of 272 team members from a multi professional health care

organization. Körner et al. showed that leadership, organizational structure, and intra professional teamwork were essential to job satisfaction. Caseworkers often have to work together in teams. Körner et al. underscored how essential teamwork and a positive organizational culture are to child welfare agencies.

Organizational culture can include two categories: proficient or resistant (Williams & Glisson, 2014). Williams and Glisson (2014) used data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAWII), a nationwide longitudinal study, to explore outcomes for those children in the child welfare agency. Williams and Glisson found that child welfare systems were more proficient and had fewer resistant climates, as well as being highly functional, well engaged, and with minimal stress. Environments that are proficient, engaged, functional, and stressful also have positive youth outcomes.

Environments in which employees feel supported by the agency result in better outcomes for worker performances, as well as for the youth served by the agencies. Despite high levels of stress, organizations with a positive organizational culture (e.g., support and engagement from the organization) have positive outcomes (Williams & Glisson, 2014). Furthermore, child welfare youth in agencies with staff who believed that they were making positive achievements through their work and those who felt connected with their clients had better outcomes (Glisson & Green, 2011).

Organizational climate involves employee perspectives and perceptions in all levels of engagement and stressfulness of the work environments (Collins-Camargo et al., 2012; Johnco et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2011; Tsai, 2011; Shim, 2014; Westbrook et al.,

2012). A climate of engagement includes staff who (a) experience high regard for their work, (b) are successful in their work, and (c) provide a high quality of services to clients (Johnco et al., 2014; Shim, 2014; Tsai, 2011; Westbrook et al., 2012). Work environments considered to be stressful are those where staff believed that they could not complete their work due to the excessive amount or uncertainty as to how or why they were to do their job (Boyas, Wind, & Ruiz, 2013; Mandell et al., 2013; Shim, 2014). These stressful environments result in staff feelings of emotional exhaustion.

In a study of child welfare staff, Shim (2010) explored the association between agency climate and culture with the intent to leave the field of child welfare. As a result of analysis of data from caseworkers and child welfare agencies, clarity in agency plans for rewards and incentives for high performers resulted in staff with a greater intention to remain employed with the organization. On the other hand, child welfare employees with high levels of emotional exhaustion were more likely to be looking for employment outside of child welfare. These findings were consistent with those of Boyas et al. (2013).

Shim (2010) ultimately theorized that high levels of emotional exhaustion were detrimental to staff retention. Mandell et al. (2013) contradicted this finding, asserting that staff who experienced emotional exhaustion could have high levels of job satisfaction and consequently stay employed in the field. Furthermore, caseworkers' perspectives of their roles as caseworkers mitigated any emotional exhaustion experienced on the job. Several factors (i.e., positive interactions with their coworkers or

supervisors) helped emotionally exhausted individuals feel committed to the job due to their satisfaction with their roles.

Mandell et al.'s (2013) findings differed from those of Shim (2010), who claimed that agency-wide rewards decreased emotional exhaustion. However, Mandell et al. argued that resilience mitigated the adverse factor of emotional exhaustion. The importance of resilience is consistent with findings of Lee et al. (2011), who claimed that caseworkers' positive coping skills played a significant role in their determination to remain in the field of child welfare.

Spath et al. (2013) explored how agency culture affected caseworker satisfaction and retention. Emerging themes were lack of communication, failure of agencies to acknowledge caseworker accomplishments, excessively high expectations for the quantity and quality of work, and adverse work conditions, which facilitated negative organizational culture. Westbrook et al. (2012) concurred with the importance of positive organizational culture as a means to retain staff. However, positive supervisory support, employee praise or rewards, and time for educational supervision between the supervisor and the worker were necessary to retain employees. Schweitzer et al. (2013) asserted that additional factors affecting turnover included workload, caseload, and manageability of the work.

In regard to the effect of agency climate and culture in social service agencies, Yűrűr and Sarikaya (2012) explored how supervisory support, staff involvement, clarity in company policies, and ambiguity affected staff desire to leave the field. Satisfaction with the work and a sense of accomplishment or success on the job enhanced staff

commitment to remain on the job.   Supervisory staff should be aware of the effects of these factors on their employees and how their supervision affected the quality of services their employees provided to families.

Effects of Staff Turnover

Many researchers' explored variables related to staff turnover in child welfare agencies (i.e., Aguiniga et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2012). This turnover resulted in difficulties for the agencies (Shim, 2014), the staff (Collins-Camargo et al., 2012), and their clients (Flower et al., 2005; Jackson et al., 2011; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010). According to Flower et al. families struggled with delays in permanency, longer stays in foster care, development of distrust of caseworkers, and instability of their case. Jackson et al. discovered that families with children in extended foster care stay frequently became traumatized due to frequent placement changes, maltreatment in foster care, and adverse emotional responses to their stay in foster care.

Child Welfare Agency

Child welfare agencies often struggled with the financial costs of staff turnover, including the costs of separation, replacement, and training new employees (Babatunde & Laoye, 2011; Keller, 2014; Wallace & Gaylor, 2012). The state of Texas lost an estimated $54,000 for each caseworker who left their agency, for a total of over $72 million a year (Tripp et al., 2014). Costs related to staff turnover were expenditures (e.g., processing resignations, recruitment, hiring, or training new employees). Other non-specified costs included the cost to the agency from the lack of workforce, resulting in poor service delivery (Wallace & Gaylor, 2012). Additional costs also included the

agency having to pay staff overtime due to employee shortages (Babatunde & Laoye, 2011). Bryant and Allen (2013) found that staff turnover negatively affected staff morale, productivity, and satisfaction.

One significant financial factor that occurred with high rates of staff turnover was training new employees (Ballinger, Craig, Cross & Gray, 2011). Replacement costs of a departing employee could be high because the agency lost not only an individual, but also their skills, abilities, connections, and collaborative ability. High rates of staff turnover continue to drain child welfare agencies (Babatunde & Laoye, 2011; Keller, 2014; Wallace & Gaylor, 2012).

Child Welfare Staff

Rittschof and Fortunato (2016) found a connection between caseworker burnout and detachment from their clients. Once workers are struggling with burnout, they detach from a client-caseworker relationship, which can result in a decline in the quality of client services. Caseworkers experience burnout due to the challenges of the job related to highly stressful situations, demanding work schedules, and exposure to secondary trauma (Middleton & Potter, 2015; Rittschof & Fortunato, 2016).

Many child welfare staff members leave the field due to the stress of the job, both emotionally and physically, as well as the extensive exposure to secondary or vicarious trauma (Douglas, 2013). The negative images of the work (Middleton & Potter, 2015) and hostility that caseworkers experience hurt employees (Chenot, 2011). This hostility can come from resistant clients, as well as from the media, court systems, or governmental officials in response to highly publicized incidents of child abuse.

Issues that brought about employee dissatisfaction for caseworkers include high caseloads, demanding workload, regular overtime expectations, and excessive paperwork (Faller et al., 2010). Turnover complicated these issues because the remaining staff must pick up the work of those who departed (Bliss, Gillespie, & Gongaware, 2010; Collins-Camargo et al., 2012). Taking on additional cases compounded issues related to current caseloads, demands on the worker, overtime, and paperwork (Bliss et al., 2010; Collins-Camargo et al., 2012).

Youth in Foster Care

Flower et al. (2005) found that youth who did not have a change in their caseworker from the onset of their case were able to return home sooner or achieve permanency more quickly. The timeliness of achieving permanency is a factor that the Office of the Administration for Children and Families tracks through their Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) process (ACF, 2015). Two standards or outcomes included the stability of placement and length of time to achieve reunification (ACF, 2015). These two outcomes were difficult to accomplish when families lost their trusted caseworker (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010). One youth in foster care in Sweden had this to say about their departed caseworkers: "I don't even remember their names. I don't care about them, and they don't care about me much either" (Skoog et al., 2015, p. 1898).

Staff turnover affected clients of the welfare agencies, as workers also left their assigned families. Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2010) explored the loss of a child welfare caseworker from the perspective of foster care youth. Young people experienced a loss of the trusting relationship with their worker, as well as a feeling of instability.

Augsberger and Swenson (2015) interviewed 18 youths in foster care, who reported that they had a difficult time developing trust and opening up to their caseworker when they faced changes in their assigned workers.

Additionally, these youths reported that they didn't like attaching to their caseworkers when they were likely to get a new one in the future. It was also frustrating for these youths to get a new worker who did not know about their life or their case, because they had to retell things that the previous worker knew (Augsberger & Swenson, 2015). Youth preferred knowing about a transition from one worker to another (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010). When informing youth of the impending change, caseworkers prepared them for the losses they might experience.

Unfortunately, children who had been in foster care faced many losses (Pryce & Samuels, 2010). These losses included their biological family and their foster family for each placement they experienced. Foster care youth reported that they struggled with recurring thoughts of their many placement moves due to instability (Unrau, Seita, & Putney, 2008).

Skoog et al. (2015) studied youth in foster care in Sweden to determine the effect of turnover and placement changes for the children. The qualitative study provided insights into feelings from youth. Comments made by one youth on the foster care experiences were as follows: "You aren't yourself—who you were before, when you lived at home; you become different in some way" (p. 1895).

This finding is similar to that of Rostill-Brooks, Larkin, Toms, and Churchman (2011), who indicated that youth in care had to adapt to frequent moves and experienced

emotional upset due to their instability. Additionally, youth in care reported that they worried about their parents and their progress on their case plan (Skoog et al., 2015). Skoog et al reported that one youth expressed that they felt betrayed by parents with their continuing use of alcohol. They "chose alcohol before me" (p. 1895).

Educational stability is difficult for youth in foster care because these children average 3.1 moves in their placement (Casey Family Programs, 2011). These moves often result in changes in their school. Frequent changes in schools, or school mobility, are seen as critical factors in any child's school performance but this was particularly true for young children in foster care (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Pears, Kim, Buchanan, & Fisher, 2015).

Grigg (2012) and Herbers et al. (2012) reported that moves occurring during the school year, in contrast to summertime or extended school breaks, were more disruptive for children. Children who moved in the middle of the school year often struggled with the changes in their educational environments as well as social environments. It is unfortunate that many children enter foster care at times other than summer and must face a break or change in their educational setting. These changes are often traumatic for these children.

In a study of a metropolitan area located in the Pacific Northwest, Pears et al. (2015) found that over 50% of the foster care moves occurred during the school year, with over 80% of these moves occurring outside the school district. Moves outside the school district of origin were problematic, as they brought about a delay in the transfer of the child's information. This delay prevented children who had special needs from

getting the optimal level of instruction and specialized services planned for the child

(Grigg, 2012). Zetlin, MacLeod, and Kimm (2012) found that 30-50% of youth in foster

care met the criteria for special education services, in contrast with approximately 11% of

the general population of children in schools.

Children in foster care often faced other difficulties when it came to their school

lives. Levy et al. (2014) conducted focus groups with 18 youths who were currently or

had been in foster care to explore their experiences. Youth reported that they often did

not have an opportunity to self-disclose their foster care status, as the foster parents were

well-known in the community. Alternatively, they had a forced disclosure due to their

inability to participate in after-hours school programs or activities. When discussing

changing schools, one youth reported that he faced varying curricula and responsibility

for testing on a different curriculum than his former school. Also a youth reported being

placed in an Algebra class four times at various schools, despite the fact he had passed

the course four times. Finally, children complained that their status in foster care often

brought about absences due to court, counseling, or other appointments during school

hours.

Child welfare agencies are responsible for meeting the needs of children in their

care (Thompson, 2015), including meeting the children's medical needs. Caseworker

turnover, in combination with the possibility of multiple placement moves, placed foster

children at risk for compromised medical needs. Staff changes and placement moves for

a child could result in the loss of critical health information, including fragmented records

that inadequately reflect the services provided for the child, their medications, or past illnesses or conditions the child may have had.

Parental Perspectives on their Child Welfare Experiences

How parents perceived their roles when involved with child welfare agencies is important. According to Schofield et al. (2011), parental identity could be a struggle for those individuals with children placed in foster care. Parents traditionally identify with the role of their child's caregiver, but after removal, their role in their child's life becomes different. Children in foster care have limited contact with their parents. Additionally, parents no longer assumed a decision-making role for their child. Many parents experienced a conflict between how society perceived them and how they saw themselves as parents.

Removal of an individual's children often brings about feelings of grief and loss; however, these feelings often manifest as anger (Schofield et al., 2011). The target of the anger was frequently the caseworker, the agency, or the court system. Typically, parents became frustrated and wished that their child welfare worker experienced the removal of their children or family members in order for them to understand what parents were experiencing. Feelings of frustration built when parents believed that their caseworker was not listening to them or taking their concerns about their children seriously (Featherstone & Fraser, 2012). Parents needed to receive services to support them, while allowing them to negotiate with services considered possibly intimidating. Schofield et al. (2011) reported that often, parents who experienced the removal of their children

either invested themselves fully into their case plan or became depressed, despondent, and isolated themselves.

After making a referral to the child welfare agency, an investigator who is assigned to the case assesses the risk of harm to the child (ren) in the report. This assessment can include interviews, observations, and further assessments by other agencies. Harris (2012) completed qualitative interviews with 40 individuals who experienced interviews and assessments with the child welfare agency in Australia. Some participants reported that the caseworker who assessed them was empowering, supportive, competent, and sensible. Unfortunately, others stated that the assessments made them feel that investigators were judging and distrusted them. Things that they told the investigators needed verification, as if the investigator thought that they were untruthful or dishonest.

Other parents reported feeling coerced into the assessment by the worker just showing up unannounced at their door (Harris, 2012). Some thought the coercion turned to threats, should they not want to cooperate with the assessment. Parents believed that the assessments made them suspicious of the future or further work with the agency staff. The caseworker and parent relationship could become strained. This outcome was unfortunate, because the period after an investigation, while the agency and the family were developing the case plan, was a critical time for the caseworker and the parent to build a working relationship (Featherstone & Fraser, 2012).

One mechanism that child welfare agencies could use to build a working relationship with clients was through strengths-based interventions (D'Andrade &

Huong, 2014; Lietz, 2011; Michalopoulos, Ahn, Shaw & O'Connor, 2012; Mirick, 2013).

These interventions included family-centered services that used a strengths-based

practice (Lietz, 2011; Michalopoulos et al., 2012; Mirick, 2013), including family group

decision making and empowerment for the family to take control of their child's welfare

case by involvement in the development of their case plan (e.g., recommended tasks and

objectives the providers selected for service provision) (D'Andrade & Huong, 2014).

At times this involvement could become problematic, as often, the bases of case

plans were court orders, including a multitude of mandated services and parental

compliance with attendance. In contrast to monitoring parents, growth based on

enhancing strengths of the family reinforced their engagement in the processes that

affected their children in care. It is important that child welfare agencies are strengths-

based, as opposed to compliance-based, when assessing families' progress on case plans

(Mirick, 2013).

Using a single case study (n=1), Mirick (2013) pointed out that a client decreasing

their depression or maintaining their sobriety had demonstrated better outcomes than

basing compliance or progress on the number of sessions the client attended in

counseling. The basis of this shift in focus was on (a) actual progress, (b) better

outcomes for the family, and (c) stronger, more effective engagement with the child

welfare agency. The agency should expect resistance from and with clients, but it is

important for caseworkers to provide options and choices of providers for services in

order to provide an opportunity for self-choice and empowerment for the client. Clients

who feel empowered are more likely to engage in services.

Although limited information exists on what parents needed from child welfare agencies when facing turnover, research was available on how staff helped parents feel comfortable in partnership with their case worker (Schofield et al., 2011; Slettebo, 2013). Child welfare clients wanted caseworkers who were aware of their authority and understood how their authority could affect parent-caseworker interaction (De Boer & Coady, 2007; Schofield et al., 2011). Awareness of power included the caseworker being respectful, non-judgmental, empathetic, and supportive. However, parents receiving services from child welfare agencies also wanted their caseworker to be personal, down to earth and attuned to their needs.

De Boer and Coady (2007) found that parents wanted caseworkers to be sincere, compassionate, non-judgmental, empathetic, accepting, helpful, and listen to them. These clients reported that they wanted caseworkers who (a) treated them with respect, (b) informed them of their children's life events while in placement, and (c) helped them feel that they had input and involvement in the lives of their children (Schofield et al., 2011). In addition to feeling intimidated by the power differential between the caseworker and the parent, parents often were defensive and distrustful with their caseworker. These feelings could be a barrier to the successful completion of the child welfare case plan.

Featherstone and Fraser (2012) and Schofield et al. (2011) advocated supporting parental needs when involved with child welfare agencies. Featherstone and Fraser (2012) found that clients made more significant progress when they felt the support of

agency staff. Schofield et al. (2011) reported that to minimize or eliminate distrust, the caseworker and parent needed open lines of communication.

One issue that Featherstone and Fraser (2012) identified was the gap between client and caseworker perspectives of parental progress on their case plans. Each often had different views on how the family was engaged in services. One issue considered as an area of potential conflict was that of attendance in mandated classes versus positive involvement, engagement, and interactions in those classes and with the caseworker. A recommended way to remedy this conflict was for both client and caseworker to ensure their expectations regarding engagement were congruent. Differences in opinions between the caseworker and family could create barriers to having a cooperative working relationship (Schofield et al., 2011). A trusting relationship between a caseworker and a parent can enhance the possibility of completion of a family's case (Lefevre, 2008).

Trotter (2008) stressed the importance of a positive working relationship between child welfare clients and their caseworkers. Both clients and caseworkers needed clarity in their expectations for each other. Providing clarity would prevent incidents where the client and the worker each expect something different from the other. Clearly defining their roles could help to move cases along more quickly, which in turn could mean that children returned home sooner.

Conclusion

Explorations of the many causes, effects, consequences, and strategies related to staff turnover in child welfare agencies are available in the literature. The costs of child welfare turnover are considerable to child welfare agencies, staff, and clients alike.

While the literature on the dynamics of staff turnover is plentiful from agency perspectives, little information was available on the effects of staff turnover on current or former clients.

Child welfare agency staff should know what clients need when facing the loss of their caseworkers. Child welfare clients depend on the assistance of their caseworkers to help them maneuver their way through the complex system. Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2010) found that foster care youth who experienced loss of security, instability, and lack of trust could face barriers to reunification with their families. The intent of this study was to explore the effect of staff turnover on families formerly involved with child welfare agencies.

Previously, researchers studied the causes, effects, and solutions to staff turnover in child welfare agencies (Aguiniga et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2012; Schweitzer et al., 2013; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010). While Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2010) studied how child welfare turnover affected foster care, a gap exists in the literature on how this turnover affected child welfare parents. Little was available on families and what they needed from child welfare agencies when turnover occurred.

This study contributes to the literature by exploring how child welfare managers, administrators, caseworkers, and supervisors can help clients deal with a change in caseworkers. The child welfare community can use this information to inform their practice when facing the loss of caseworkers. Information gathered should enhance knowledge for agency administrators, supervisors, and staff working in the field. The goal of improving services to families is to ensure quality service delivery and

appropriate services to help future families effectively and positively maneuver the child welfare system.

In Chapter 3, I explore the study methodology, data collection, and analysis. The method of inquiry is a basic qualitative process. This methodology allows for an exploration of how staff turnover in child welfare agencies can and does affect clients. The stories of those who have experienced child welfare turnover provide information on the effects of turnover, as well as what clients need from child welfare agencies when facing turnover.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of child welfare clients who faced multiple incidents of caseworkers' turnover while their children were in foster care. The goal was to achieve a better understanding of how families thought the child welfare agency could have helped them when their caseworker was leaving. This chapter is a discussion of the methodology used to conduct the study. It includes a description of the research design, as well as the justification for choosing a basic qualitative approach, with the detail of the processes and steps involved in qualitative research.

Throughout this chapter, I describe my role as a researcher while also identifying any ethical procedures and any potential biases. Furthermore, I provide details of the sampling strategy, sample size, participant recruitment, participant selection procedures, data collection, and methods of data analysis. Finally, I include details regarding tactics used to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability for the research.

Research Questions

The research questions for this basic qualitative study were the following:

Research Question 1: How did former child welfare clients perceive the loss of their ongoing caseworker affected their case?

Research Question 2: How did former child welfare clients perceive the loss of their ongoing caseworker affected their case plan?

Research Question 3: What can child welfare agencies do for child welfare clients to make the transition from one ongoing caseworker to another easier?

Research Design and Rationale

I conducted this study with a basic qualitative approach. According to scholars (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994), basic research is an exploration of the perceptions shared by a group of people in response to a specific situation or experiences. Researchers who use a basic qualitative approach strive to explore that experience with those who shared these experiences, as well as the perspectives of those who have shared experiences (i.e., Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2013). A gap exists in the research concerning parental experiences with child welfare staff turnover, as well as the parental loss of their caseworker when their children were in foster care. This research helps to fill this gap in the literature.

Performing research on parental perspectives of caseworker turnover provided an opportunity to explore the collected data through interviews in order to develop a greater understanding of parents who have experienced multiple incidents of their caseworkers leaving their case. The analysis explores the perceptions of their experiences while they coped with child welfare turnover (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Learning about the clients' perceptions is important to bring about changes in child welfare agencies' response to the problem of turnover.

Qualitative Research

Basic qualitative research was the most appropriate research design for this study due to the need to understand the experiences of the participants (see Moustakas, 1994).

Narrative qualitative researchers focus on one individual and explore individuals'

experiences over their lifespan (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). Case study research has a

case unit or event shared by several individuals (Rudestam & Newton, 2014).

Ethnography was not the optimal research design, as it explores how a group shares their

culture (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). Grounded theory was not an appropriate choice for

this research, as this process involved the development of a theory based on data gathered

from the participants of the study (Rudestam & Newton, 2014).

Phenomenological research is similar to basic qualitative research, as both types

of studies use interviews of individuals who share a common experience. However,

phenomenological research typically involves immersion with participants in a research

study, due to the intensity of the situation (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2013).

This method of intense inquiry typically requires multiple interviews to gain a clear

understanding of the experiences for the researcher to explain the phenomenon that the

participants experienced.

In basic qualitative research, the researcher's goal is to determine the perspectives

of those who share an experience (Merriam, 2009). Another goal is to understand the

perspectives related to those shared experiences (Merriam, 2009). Basic qualitative

research allows researchers to identify patterns, or themes, without developing a theory.

Researchers who employ basic qualitative research can develop an understanding of

participants' responses through one encounter.

Methodology

The methodology section of this study includes the setting of the research, the participants for the study, and recruitment procedures for recruiting participants. Additionally, this section includes the sample size and justification for the study. The following sections include data collection procedures, data analysis processes, and ethical issues involved in the research.

The mix of semistructured and open-ended questions during the interview process allowed participants to share their personal stories of their real-life experiences. These scenarios provided me with the data to derive themes through the commonly shared experiences regarding the participants' caseworkers. A qualitative approach offered me the opportunity to explore and develop insight into the experiences that the parents shared. A basic qualitative methodology was the most appropriate for the research due to the nature of exploring parental experiences.

The research sites included two geographic areas in KY with high levels of caseworker turnover. Participants included former clients who had children in foster care. I interviewed the participants in local libraries outside the child welfare offices. The actual setting for the research involved me meeting participants in person at the library in their geographic area. Additionally, I offered participants who were unwilling or unable to be interviewed in the community an opportunity to do a telephonic interview or an interview via Skype. Meeting in local libraries allowed me to meet participants in a neutral location. The ability to use the neutral location as well as the option for cell

phone or Skype interviews helped assist the participants in feeling comfortable discussing their former child welfare cases.

Participant Selection Logic

Purposeful sampling, as well as snowball sampling, was used for selecting participants for this study. Selection criteria for participation required that all participants had experienced caseworker turnover. Using purposeful sampling allows for exploration of the experiences of the participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Potential participant identification occurred through posting flyers in public locations, as well as advertisements on social media such as Facebook. Snowball sampling was used as well, which allows current or present study participants to refer friends or family members to the study. Snowball sampling provided an opportunity to select participants through word of mouth. Participant selection criteria included the following:

- Parents of a former foster child with a closed child welfare case

- Case must have at least one child who was placed in foster care

- The case assignment involved three or more case workers

No exclusion criteria existed in terms of participants' race, ethnicity, or gender.

I screened out some potential participants because they did not meet the screening criteria. Individuals who were under the age of 18 were not eligible to participate in the study, based on the screening criteria. However, no individuals under 18 years of age requested to be a part of the study. Additionally, participants with an open, active case were not eligible to participate in the research at the request of the child welfare agency

institutional review board (IRB) board in KY. Participant demographic information was a part of the data gathering within the selected agency sites.

Sample Size and Recruitment Procedures

The basis of the sample size in qualitative research should be saturation (Blaikie, 2018; Mason, 2010; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Saturation occurs when no new or additional information came from the sample (Mason, 2010; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Sample size in qualitative studies is smaller than that of quantitative studies because qualitative studies lack generalization but contain detailed descriptions from participants (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). According to Blaikie (2018) and Moser and Korstjens (2018), qualitative studies' sample sizes should be determined at the data collection stage of research, as opposed to predetermining a number of participants. This allows the researcher to determine when saturation is achieved. The sample size for this study was eight participants.

I recruited friends and family members to place flyers in the two geographic areas for the study. Additionally, I built a Facebook page to recruit former child welfare clients. The leaflets and Facebook page had contact information for participants to contact me. Once the potential participants contacted me, I screened them for meeting criteria for the study. During this process, candidates learned of the purpose of the study, and if interested, were scheduled for an interview at their local library. One participant opted to do a Skype interview instead of meeting at their local library.

As a part of the recruitment process, I explained confidentiality standards and the audio-taping processes before the interviews and with each participant's consent. I

interviewed participants to determine if they met screening criteria and exclusion. The first eight candidates who met screening criteria were the sample. There were no additional candidates who responded to my recruitment efforts.

As a means of compensating participants for the time they spent participating in the study, participants received a $10.00 Kroger grocery store gift card. I provided the participant who participated by Skype an e-gift card. Pandya and Desai (2013) recommended different models of compensation for research participants, including the market, wage, appreciation, and reimbursement models. I used the appreciation model by providing participants the gift cards in appreciation of their participation in the research.

Instrumentation

The researcher's role is to collect data from participants, which they will later examine, analyze, and interpret (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). The units of analysis for this study were parental responses of the sample. I developed the purpose of the interview guide to document the keywords of the participants, things that I wanted to clarify, and any significant body language by the participants (see Vagle, 2016). The interview guides from the interviews will remain in a locked file cabinet in my home for 5 years.

I completed the guide with each interview. Information collected included the site of the interview, the participant code or pseudonym, and demographic information about the participant. Additionally, the guide provided space for documentation or notes for each research question, with a space for each of the four additional subquestions related to the research questions. Each item connected to various aspects of child welfare

turnover, including how participants perceived the short- and long-term effects of the loss of their caseworker, how they perceived the change in caseworker affected their case plan, and their experiences when they were assigned a new caseworker.

The purpose of the guide was to assist participants and me in keeping the interviewed focused and the discussion on task, while also encouraging participants to share their experiences (see Merriam, 2009; Van Manen, 2016). The interview guide is typically used to keep interviews focused and to ensure that participants are asked the same questions. The guide helped achieve the goal of focusing on the participants' child welfare past experiences in the context of staff turnover.

Interview Guidelines

The open-ended and semistructured interviews allowed participants to tell their stories and past experiences with child welfare staff turnover. Each participant had a 90-minute time slot, with a half hour break between each scheduled appointment to allow extra time for participants who were more talkative than others. At the close of the interview, all participants received information on the local counseling resources in their community, in the event they became upset or distraught while narrating their stories.

As the researcher, I interviewed all participants myself, audio-taping each interview. After the interviews, I used Microsoft Word to transcribe the collected data, using a verbatim method. After transcription, I e-mailed each participant the transcript of their interview for member checking (see Kornbluh, 2015; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Mason, 2010; Rudestam & Newton, 2014). The participants were asked to return the transcripts to me by e-mail with notification of any needed corrections. Four participants

returned their transcripts with an indication that no changes were needed. The remaining

four participants did not respond to requests for feedback on the documentation of their

interviews.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis Plan**</div>

According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), Saldaña (2016), and Merriam and

Tisdell (2015), data analysis is a process of examining collected data and exploring

themes later condensed from discussions of experiences of the participants. The process

of data analysis began at the onset of the data collection process, based on taking notes,

recording and transcription of interviews and observations. The data became the basis for

coding and analysis. The outcome of this process was the establishment of themes or

similarities and differences in participant experiences in response to each research

question.

The data analysis involved breaking the words, phrases, and sentences down line

by line and determining the theme or what the participant was conveying when answering

the question. Each line included the participant number and the subject or code related to

the theme or concept that the participant shared, using the comment tab in Microsoft

Word. After all of the transcripts were edited in this manner, the coded transcripts were

color-coded, based on the particular theme or concept. At this point, I resorted the color-

coded data by the color and theme.

I analyzed the data by the individual participant and as a group. After sorting and

color coding the data, I developed a table with the data arranged by theme, with the direct

quotes of the participants. The table helped me grasp the sentiments across the study

group and allowed me to develop a greater understanding of the experiences of the group of participants. I examined interactions between the participants and their interactions between departing and new caseworkers. Historical patterns of interactions between them and significant settings of interactions will provide evidence of the impact of these changes on the participants. I explored how those interactions differed for the participants and their caseworkers in different stages of their cases and how the individuals perceived their contacts with the child welfare agency staff.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are essential for all research. A breach of ethical considerations would reflect negatively upon Walden University, child welfare agencies, and myself as the researcher. This research had the approval of the Walden University IRB, approval number 10-10-17-0325758. The KY commissioner required that the research only involve former clients. Based on the study population, the KY IRB provided documentation that they did not need to approve the study, as it did not involve current clients

The Walden University IRB reviewed the process and procedures of the research to ensure that the participants received protection from harm due to their participation in the study. This can come in the form of physical, emotional, or psychological harm. Additionally, the review boards also ensured that the rights of any protected groups were protected.

Participants' rights to confidentiality and anonymity are imperative in any research. Anonymity was a factor that was of concern for participants. The participants'

shared experiences were confidential. As a means of maintaining confidentiality, I am

not publishing participant contact information, including e-mail addresses or verbatim

copies of the transcripts in this study. Another means of ensuring anonymity was holding

the participant interviews in the community or by Skype. Additionally, participants were

identified in the research by a number instead of a name to facilitate their anonymity.

Providing numbers allowed the participants to speak freely and to share their information

without fear that I would include their name in the research.

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Connelly (2016), Cope, (2014), Korstjens and Moser (2018), and

Solomon and Amankwaa, (2017), trustworthiness is found in research that has internal

and external validity. It is important for researchers to provide credibility, transferability,

dependability, reliability, conformability, and objectivity for their research (Connelly,

2016; Cope, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Solomon & Amankwaa, 2017). In the

upcoming sections, I discuss the issues related to the trustworthiness of research,

including external and internal validity.

Credibility

Credibility or internal validity for qualitative research results in research in which

there is certainty in the findings (Connelly, 2016; Cope, 2014; Solomon & Amankwaa,

2017). I followed recommended standards for the type of research, including the number

of participants, the method of data collection, and analysis of data, helping to establish

credibility in this study (see Rudestam & Newton, 2014). Spending time with the

participants and recording their interviews allowed me to ensure the information I

transcribed was an accurate portrayal of their works, which helped to provide the opportunity for internal validity or credibility of the data.

The process of sending the transcripts to the participants after transcription for member checking was another strategy to enhance the credibility of the study (Chang, 2014; Kornbluh, 2015; Rudestam & Newton, 2014). The review and approval of the transcripts by participants lends credibility or internal validity to the data. Additional methods used to facilitate credibility involve triangulation. Triangulation allows a researcher to utilize a variety of sources of information, including interviews, observations, and research journals. Observations and the research journal, along with the transcripts, helped me to ensure I had an accurate grasp of the participants' experiences. Finally, my research journal allowed me to reflect on my experiences working in the field of child welfare and provided the opportunity to utilize reflexivity, or the acknowledgment of the relationship between me as the researcher, with a history of experience working in the field of child welfare for many years (Solomon & Amankwaa, 2017), and the participants.

Transferability

Transferability or external validity for qualitative research involves the ability to apply findings from this study to similar studies (Connelly, 2016; Solomon & Amankwaa, 2017). Transferability involves the connections between this research and other research by the use of thick and detailed descriptions. Using the detailed experiences of participants provides an opportunity to look into the experiences of this group of child welfare clients and to generalize the experiences of other child welfare

clients. Current child welfare staff can explore the feelings and experiences of these participants to reflect on the feelings and emotions of current child welfare agency clients. The data from this research links to the interviews and the data from this study relates to other research on the experiences of those in similar situations.

Dependability and Confirmability

Assurance of dependability and confirmability allows future researchers the opportunity to replicate and confirm my findings (Cope, 2014; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The use of audit trails and journaling documents the research process. Audit trails provide future researchers with an opportunity to replicate this study or confirm the data and the findings. Triangulation, or the use of interviews, observations, and notes, allows for multiple sources of data, which added dependability to the findings of the research. Finally, the journal notes and the audit trail helped to provide reflexivity, which is an important component of confirmability.

Role of the Researcher

Generally, one goal of qualitative research is to explore how a specific population perceives their experiences with a specific phenomenon, event, or situation (Camacho, 2016; Clark & Vealé, 2018; Karagionzis, 2018). The role of the researcher is significant in qualitative research. Typically, researchers choose topics that they have an interest in or are passionate about. However, with that interest or passion, there can also be bias, preconceived notions, or personal feelings (Camacho, 2016; Clark & Vealé, 2018; Karagionzis, 2018). When conducting qualitative research, the researcher must be aware of these feelings (Camacho, 2016; Clark & Vealé, 2018; Karagionzis, 2018).

Reflexibility is an important factor in qualitative research as the researcher uses reflexibility throughout the qualitative research process (Camacho, 2016; Clark & Vealé, 2018; Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009; Karagionzis, 2018). Using reflection in the research process involves the researcher acknowledging their pre-conceived notions, yet setting aside these notions in the process of exploring participants' experiences and perspectives related to the study project (Camacho, 2016; Clark & Vealé, 2018; Jootun et al., 2009; Karagionzis, 2018). It is important for researchers to keep an open mind and to respect, accept, and learn from participants' thoughts and feelings about their experiences. After all, people are the experts on their lives. As someone on the outside of child welfare, who has never experienced having a case with the agency, I have to accept that those on the inside, or who have had open cases, are better equipped to describe their experiences.

As a researcher who has a career in child welfare, I must be aware of my life experiences in regard to this research topic. I have 19 years' experience with a child welfare agency in KY. I have worked as a front-line caseworker and supervisor for six years each in Louisville and worked as a manager or administrator for seven years in another area of the state. I do not currently work in either of the research areas. I worked as a case worker and supervisor in the Louisville child welfare offices ten years ago.

Camacho (2016) recommended the use of reflexivity for the researcher by sharing previous experiences and perspectives of staff turnover as an employee in the field of child welfare. Sharing my experiences and perspectives will help to bring any potential bias or conflict out in the open from the beginning. I used suggestions from Garner and

Scott (2013, p. 68-69) to minimize any potential researcher bias. Specifically, I used the

following:

- I asked open-ended questions that didn't guide the participant in a
  direction I wanted them to go.

- I provided transparency throughout all stages of the research, including
  how and why I made the choices that I did in regard to collection and
  analysis of data.

- I understood that the findings might not align with my original beliefs
  about how families were impacted by staff turnover.

- I was aware of my personal value system, as well as the value systems of
  those who would read or interpret the findings of the research.

Participants for this study came from former child welfare parents with cases from

two areas in KY. One area is a tri-county area located in northern KY. The other area is

Louisville, KY. The northern KY area has a population of 375,618 people, while

Louisville has a population of 750,810 (U.S. Places, n.d). Both areas have high rates of

child welfare staff turnover.

As the researcher, I facilitated the storytelling process with the participants as I

documented their stories. I collected information by asking open-ended and semi-

structured questions to encourage participants to share their stories. As participants

became more accustomed to the storytelling process, I encouraged greater detail in the

stories by interjecting encouraging and probing comments and through attentiveness.

Additionally, displaying body language (i.e., leaning in, encouraging head nods, and

gestures) was a way of acknowledging interest in their stories for face-to-face interviews.

Attentiveness for phone interviews and Skype interviews involved encouraging words.

Summary

This chapter was a discussion of the research methodology used for this study. It

included information about the rationale for the selection of a basic qualitative research

study. The chapter contains the study research questions, as well as a topic guide for the

interview process. Other procedural information, including the selection of participants,

sample size, and interview protocol, is included in the chapter. I provided data analysis

and information on issues of trustworthiness in the chapter. These issues include those

related to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The end of the

chapter contains information related to ethical procedures necessary for conducting

research. The upcoming Chapter 4 will include a discussion of the collected data and an

analysis of the data. The chapter will include detailed responses for each of the research

questions and identify themes observed in the data collection process.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perspectives of child

welfare clients who have faced the turnover of staff in child welfare agencies. My goal

was to help child welfare agencies enhance their awareness of how staff turnover of

caseworkers' impacts families served, as well as to obtain advice or recommendations for

child welfare agencies on what families need from the agency when a family is facing the

loss of their caseworker. In the research question from this generalized qualitative study,

I explored how former child welfare clients perceive that staff turnover in the child

welfare agency affected the outcome of their case and their case plan. Additionally, I

explored what former clients would like for the agencies to know to make facing turnover

of their caseworker easier.

In this chapter, I explore the recruitment, setting for interviews, demographics of

the participants, interview protocol, and the interview questions used to obtain the

collected data. Details of the data collection processes are shared and explained.

Following the information on the data collection process, I discuss the analysis process.

After the discussion of the analysis, I explore the findings. After discussing credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability, I review the results of the analysis

related to the research question.

Setting

Participants for this study were recruited using purposeful sampling. Recruitment

of participants involved posting flyers in two communities in two geographic areas of

KYs, as well as through snowball sampling or referrals for new participants from active

participants' friends or family members who fit the criteria (see Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Participants must have been former clients of the statewide child welfare system, with a history of removal of at least one child, and the family had to have at least three ongoing caseworkers while their case was open. Flyers were posted in various locations through the communities, including laundromats, libraries, and other business establishments.

Potential participants were asked to contact me for the screening for the study. Once the participant met the screening criteria, we scheduled an interview. Options for interviews were either by Skype or face to face at the local library in the participant's community. One participant elected to have a Skype interview, and the remaining seven participants chose to have face-to-face interviews. Meetings took place at two community libraries, in private conference rooms, with a table and several chairs in each room. These conference rooms were available for any citizen in the community to use.

Sample Size and Demographics

The sample size for this research included eight individuals. Qualitative research typically involves a smaller sample size than quantitative research (Mason, 2010; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). When conducting interviews, the qualitative researcher's goal is to achieve saturation of the data (Mason, 2010; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Saturation occurs when the researcher determines that there is no new information coming from the participants. Saturation occurred in this research after eight interviews.

There were eight participants, with three participants residing in Northern KY and five participants living in the Louisville, KY, which is the largest metropolitan area of the

state. The Northern KY interview participants consisted of two women and one man.

The first participant (P-1) from Northern KY was a 43-year-old Caucasian man who had

an extensive history with the agency. His experience was in two distinct areas of the

state, but his most recent case had been active in Northern KY. He reported that over

time, he had up to 15 caseworkers on his case but stated that he had three caseworkers

while his case was most recently open. The second participant (P-2) was a 26-year-old

Caucasian female who reported having four ongoing caseworkers. Participant 3 (P-3)

was a 32-year-old Caucasian female with a history of five caseworkers.

The other participants were from Louisville, KY. The first participant from

Louisville was a 24-year-old Caucasian female (P-4). She reported that she had three

ongoing caseworkers while her case was open. The second participant from Louisville

was a 22-year-old Caucasian female who had four caseworkers (P-5). The next

participant was a 39-year-old Black female who had five ongoing caseworkers (P-6),

followed by a 41-year-old Black female, with experience with six caseworkers (P-7).

Finally, the last participant was a 25-year-old female Caucasian who had three

caseworkers (P-8).

At the time of the interviews, none of the participants had an open case with the

child welfare agency. Child welfare cases typically close when there is a reduction of the

risk factors for abuse or neglect of the children, or when permanency has been achieved

(KY, 2018). Permanency for children can include remaining in the home with the family,

successfully reuniting with the family, and permanent placement for the children through

either permanent custody to an individual or adoption of the children (KY, 2018).

Additionally, in KY, cases close when the youngest child in the family has reached 18

years of age if they are living in the home and not in the care of the agency, on extended

commitment. Table 1 is a depiction of the participants' demographics.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

	Age	Gender	Race	Number of caseworkers
Participant 1	43	Male	Caucasian	3
Participant 2	26	Female	Caucasian	4
Participant 3	32	Female	Caucasian	5
Participant 4	24	Female	Caucasian	3
Participant 5	22	Female	Caucasian	4
Participant 6	39	Female	Black	5
Participant 7	41	Female	Black	6
Participant 8	25	Female	Black	3

Data Collection

The schedule for the interviews allowed approximately 90 minutes for each

interview. However, the meetings lasted 75 minutes or less. Before initiation of the

conversations, the participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and informed of

the confidentiality of the information they shared. I told the individuals that I would be

using a digital voice recorder, as well as a recorder on my cell phone, to ensure that I had

a thorough account of the information that they provided.

I informed the participants that the recorder and my cell phone were password

protected and that I was the only one who had access to the material. I also informed the

participants that I would transcribe the recordings and delete them from the devices after

transcription. Member checking was introduced to the participants when I told them that

after I transcribed the interviews, I would e-mail those copies of their transcriptions for

review. The participants were encouraged to review the transcripts and e-mail them back to me with any corrections or clarification.

After reviewing the consent forms, participants signed the forms. Following the review of the consent forms, I informed the participants of the interview and transcription processes. I reviewed the interview guide with the participants as I continued to build rapport. The interview itself involved me reading the interview questions and allowing the participants to answer the questions using a responsive interviewing process, as recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2011). This process involved asking the question, exploring their answer, and clarifying their thoughts. I used the interview guide for all interviews, with each participant being asked the same questions, with only a clarifying question included in the process. I interviewed each participant once.

Participants received a $10.00 Kroger grocery gift card after their interviews, to show my appreciation for their participation in the study and to compensate them for their time and travel to the interview site. The Skype interview participant received a Kroger e-gift card. The compensation of the participants was consistent with the appreciation and reimbursement models recommended by Pandya and Desai (2013).

At the close of the interviews, I reminded the participants that I would be e-mailing them a copy of their transcript for review. After completion of the transcription process, the participants were e-mailed copies of their transcripts to assess them for accuracy. Participants were instructed after review to e-mail the transcripts back to me with any requests for adjustments or corrections or to notify me that the transcripts were

satisfactory. Only four participants responded, and all of them reported that their transcripts were satisfactory and did not need to be changed or adjusted.

Data Analysis

After the transcription of the data and approval from the participants, the analysis process began. Analysis of the data involved using the steps developed by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003), which included (a) getting to know the data, (b) focusing the analysis on the research question, (c) categorizing or coding the data, (d) identifying patterns and connections, and (e) interpreting the data. To get to know the data, I read the transcripts over several times, to ensure that I had a clear grasp of the information shared and to understand each participant's perspective. Initially, I categorized and coded the data based on topic, without focusing on Step 2, or focusing the analysis on the research question. At that time, I reexamined the data to focus on the research question and recoded the relevant data into categories using open coding. I wanted to ensure I had a global understanding of the interview responses. While working with the data, I began the process of Step 5, or interpreting the data.

Data analysis allows the researcher to examine collected data and explore the statements of the participants for themes and shared experiences across participants (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). Using the interview protocol sheets (Appendix B) allowed me to ensure that the questions asked to each participant were the same, to ensure that I had a clear picture of their collective experiences.

My original plan of analysis was to use the NVIVO system to organize the collected data. However, I decided that I could be more effective in the analysis of the

data if I manually coded the data. As suggested by Bazeley (2013), I explored participants' stories related to their experiences with the loss of their caseworker. While exploring the participants' stories, I took into consideration the participants' emotions while they described their responses to the changes in caseworkers (see Saldaña, 2016).

The process of analyzing the data included exploring participants' stories of their experiences with child welfare turnover and their emotional responses and perspectives. The actual analysis process involved pattern coding (see Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding consists of the process of grouping data into categories that are similar to each other. I separated the transcripts line by line, or sentence by sentence, and identified the theme related to the sentence (see Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). The sentences or lines were combined by themes, after the identification of the particular themes from the data. At that time, I developed a chart of themes. Finally, I completed a table with all of the narratives from the interviews based on the theme of the participants' responses. I analyzed all of the transcripts in this manner.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In Chapter 3, I explained strategies to ensure trustworthiness. Trustworthiness occurs through ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, reliability, conformability, and objectivity (Connelly, 2016; Cope, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Rudestam & Newton, 2014). There were several processes in place to establish trustworthiness of the research, data collection, and analysis. These processes included member checking, detailed descriptions of the interview processes and the interviews, and recording the interviews.

Credibility

Saldaña (2016) indicated that often, credibility relies on the perceptions of the participants. In the data collection process, audio-taping interviews, member checking, and triangulation are strategies used to enhance credibility (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). The method of audio-taping the interviews and providing transcripts to the participants for verification provided credibility. All of the participants received their transcript for review by e-mail, with an opportunity to check the transcript for validity or lack of clarity. Four of the participants responded that the transcripts were accurate and reflected the information correctly. The other four participants failed to respond to two requests for feedback to their transcripts. There were no changes in the transcripts necessary after review by the participants.

To achieve triangulation of the data collection process, I used journaling, observations of participants during the interviews, and transcription of the collected data (see Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Nelville, 2014). Use of various sources of information and interaction with the participants, including observations, spending time with the participants in interviews, and keeping a journal of my thoughts and feelings during the research process, allowed me as a researcher to have a full picture of the meaning of the data and the nuances of the participants' experiences. Additionally, the research journal provided me with an opportunity to practice reflexivity while I acknowledged my relationship as a researcher, but also as a manager in the field of child welfare (see Camacho, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research provides external validity and addresses the researcher's ability to connect their data to the experiences of the study population (Connelly, 2016; Cope, 2014; Korstjens, & Moser, 2018; & Solomon & Amankwaa, 2017). Using the participants' real-life experiences allows those reading the study to generalize the knowledge held by other individuals facing similar circumstances, or in this case, those individuals who were facing worker turnover in their child welfare case (see Rudestam & Newton, 2014; Yardley, 2017). The descriptions of the participants' experiences allow individuals insight into how families process child welfare turnover and how they learn to cope with the uncertainty of their child welfare caseworker assignment.

Dependability and Conformability

Developing and maintaining an audit trail and researcher's journal provides the opportunity for dependability and consistency of the research process (Cope, 2014; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The records of the study, including IRB forms, interview guide, consent forms, and recruitment flyers, are a portion of the audit trail that enables other researchers to duplicate this research in the future (see Cope, 2014; Rudestam & Newton, 2014; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The use of the interview guide also ensures that each participant is asked the same questions and has the equal opportunity to describe their experiences (Merriam, 2009; Van Manen, 2016). Finally, the triangulation of the interviews, observations, and notes adds dependability to the findings (Carter et al., 2014; Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). Using a researcher's journal, interview guide,

member checking, and triangulation allows me to provide trustworthiness of the data collection and the study.

Reflexivity is essential for establishing confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Solomon & Amankwaa, 2017). As a researcher, it is imperative to be aware of my role, as well as address my biases and beliefs related to the study topic (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). As I had been a former manager in a child welfare agency, it was essential to set that role aside to prevent influencing the research data. Garner and Scott (2013) outlined steps to minimize research bias, including using open-ended questions that do not guide the participants, transparency of the researcher, awareness that the research findings may lead the researcher to draw different conclusions than what they expected, and awareness of their own value system that has the potential to cloud their judgment. Self-awareness is critical when conducting research (Garner & Scott, 2013).

Results

This study was developed to explore the perspectives of child welfare clients who have experienced multiple losses of their children welfare worker while their case was open. The long-term goal of this research was to discover views of the clients who have faced staff turnover on their child welfare case, as well as to understand what child welfare agencies could do to make the transition to a new worker easier on the client.

There were six themes that emerged from the analysis of the responses of the participants: (a) effect of turnover on the outcome of the case, (b) loss that comes with turnover, (c) different perspectives, (d) frustration with the notification of change, (e) case plan changes, and (f) advice for child welfare agencies. Each theme helped to

understand what clients experience when facing child welfare turnover. Additionally, participants were able to articulate what they needed from child welfare agencies when they are facing the loss of their caseworker. The following themes and subthemes are based on the descriptions of the experiences of the participants.

Theme 1: Effect of Turnover on the Outcome of the Case

I explored the effect of turnover on the outcome of the case to answer the research question "How do child welfare clients perceive the loss of their ongoing caseworker affected their case" with the first three themes. The participants' opinions of how turnover impacted their case included delays in their case due to turnover, the participants becoming discouraged and giving up working on their situation, and permanency outcomes of their case. Although some participants directly blamed specific caseworkers for perceived adverse outcomes in their cases, many participants indicated that their frustration and discouragement came from the series of changes of caseworkers.

Half of the participants expressed that specific caseworkers had an impact on their case. P-1 shared, "After the second worker left, it seemed like the bottom fell out of our case. I think that we would have our son back if not for the second worker leaving." P-2 disclosed, "At first, getting a new worker seemed to get me back on track. The last change of workers is really what turned my case around." P-4 reported, "Things got better after this (third) worker was on my case." P-6 noted, "The third worker was when my case really took a turn." In regard to generalized opinions of how turnover affected their cases, P-5 expressed, "It (the outcome of the case) would have been better if the

workers didn't leave." Furthermore, several participants indicated that they were glad that some of their caseworkers left but unhappy that other caseworkers were going.

Subtheme: Delays due to turnover. In regard to the delay in the movement of participants' cases, P-7 stated,

> It's a shame what I had to go through (with CPS) with getting my hopes up that my kids were coming home, only to have the worker change, and I had to wait until the next worker got to know more about my case. After a while, I just gave up; I checked out. I worked really hard at first, but I got so discouraged. I felt like it was hopeless. I got tired of trying. In the end, I told the last worker to just let my kids stay with my dad. Emotionally, I just couldn't do it (work with CPS) anymore.

Subtheme: Permanency. In regard to the effect of participants' perceptions of turnover on the permanency or long-term placement of the children, it is highly likely that the attitudes of the client depend on whether the participant was able to reunify with their child or children. Three of the eight participants were unable to reunite with their children. P-1 stated,

> I was hoping that we could try to get custody of our son back. Our third caseworker recommended that our family member take permanent custody of our son because she thought we didn't make progress. We felt like there was no use staying in our classes (after permanent custody was lost).

The permanent loss of custody was challenging to process for some participants. P-1 stated,

The whole thing (having a CPS case) was awful. I don't ever want another

worker. My kids are with my dad, and I'm not having any more kids, so I

shouldn't have to worry about that (having another case). No more kids, no more

CPS in my life. They (the workers) just didn't know they were the source of my

anxiety. I am calm now that I don't have to deal with CPS.

The overarching theme that the participants revealed was that staff turnover did

have a significant effect on their child welfare cases. Sometimes the result was emotional

stress or uncertainty, while other times it was frustration. P-7 reported, "After the fourth

worker, I got to the point that it was all just bad; I felt like they were all going to leave."

It was as if the participants felt a sense of abandonment by their caseworker when they

left their case.

Theme 2: Loss That Comes with Turnover

Participants continued to shed light upon the research question "How do child

welfare clients perceive the loss of their ongoing caseworker affected their case" when

looking at how they perceived the loss of the worker as a loss of knowledge of their case,

their family, and their situation. P-6 reported,

There was some confusion when the new worker came on board (was assigned

the case) because the worker lost my certificates for my stuff I completed. Thank

goodness I saved my copies (of the certificates of completion of services), so it

wasn't a big problem.

Subtheme: Loss of history/knowledge. Another participant struggled with the

loss of knowledge about their case. P-3 stated,

Sometimes the new worker didn't know anything about my case. Like, I never used drugs, but a bunch of times new workers would act like I used drugs. If they (the new workers) knew my case, they would have known that I don't use drugs. It seemed like they (new workers) didn't care enough to get to know about my case before they started working with me.

P-1 shared, "I would feel good about getting a new caseworker, as long as they did not just read the old file and make a judgment about me and my girl." Two participants stated that the lack of knowledge of their case resulted in them having to start over with workers who didn't know the history of their story. P-3 stated, "I also didn't like having to tell my story again (when I got a new worker)." P-7 revealed, "Each time (I had to tell my story over), it pissed me off. I shouldn't have to tell my story over and over."

Frustration was a common theme among participants when describing their experiences of losing their caseworker. Feeling "weird" or expressing distrust of the new worker was common. The loss of knowledge of the caseworker was frustrating at times, but at other times, it was a positive experience for participants.

Theme 3: Different Perspectives

As reported previously, trust is an essential factor in the relationship between a caseworker and their clients (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010; Schofield et al., 2011; Augsberger & Swenson, 2015; Lefevre, 2008). It is essential that child welfare clients feel as though they can trust their caseworkers. Some participants expressed that they had positive relationships that involved trust of their caseworker. P-4 expressed,

> I felt like she (her third worker) respected me. She believed in me. She could see how I had changed and gave me credit for how hard I worked to get my kids back. She trusted me.

However, this participant did not feel this way about all of her caseworkers. P-4 reported,

> I felt like the first caseworker didn't give me a chance. She acted like she knew everything. She acted like she was an investigator. Everything I told her she would check it out like she thought I was lying about everything I said. She didn't trust me, so I didn't trust that she was there to help me. Trust is important to me.

It is understandable that developing a trusting relationship with a caseworker that demonstrated that they did not trust the participant as a client would be difficult. Often, inconsistency across caseworkers was a source of distrust or negative feelings about a caseworker.

Some participants expressed frustration regarding different decisions on the issue of services that clients received. P-6 reported,

> He (third caseworker) accepted my parenting classes from the agency that I wanted to take them with. The two workers before said they (the treatment provider) were not approved for the parenting classes that I was ordered to complete. I thought it was stupid since the parenting classes were for CPS and the entire class was full of other CPS clients. The other workers wanted me to start my sessions over with a new provider. I did not agree.

The participant came to the conclusion that the caseworker was deliberately set on seeing her fail, based on the conflict that arose surrounding the treatment provider. Another participant disagreed with the worker's recommendations for services, particularly after the participant had completed an assessment which failed to recommend the services the caseworker had recommended. P-5 reported,

I had a lot of things on my plan in the beginning, including drug screens, parenting, anger management, domestic violence, and all kinds of assessments. The assessments came back, and I didn't need a lot of things on my plan the social worker wanted me to do. I didn't care if the classes were good for me, if I didn't need them, I didn't want to take them. The court said I didn't have to take the classes, so I didn't finish them.

Many participants expressed displeasure with their child welfare case plan. The natural process for case planning is that a client receives a case plan, and as they complete tasks on their plan, those tasks are no longer a part of the case plan. Additionally, as new information emerges, additional responsibilities may be added to the plan to address any concerns. The following theme answers the second research question: "How did child welfare clients perceive the loss of their ongoing child welfare caseworker affected their permanency planning or expectations?"

Theme 4: Frustration with Notification of Change (T)

Not only did participants express frustration with the lack of knowledge that came with a change of caseworkers, but they were also equally frustrated with the notification process for the loss of their caseworkers. There was significant inconsistency with the

process of informing clients that they were getting a new worker. Five participants (P-2, P-4, P-5, P-6, and P-8) reported that they knew ahead of time that they were getting a new caseworker. Additionally, one participant said that her caseworker had introduced her to her new worker in advance. P-6 stated, "She (the worker) brought the new worker with her (on a home visit). She (the new worker) had been with her on a home visit once or twice before." The familiarity with the new caseworker in advance helped to ease the transition to a new worker.

However, some participants reported that they did not receive any advance notice of a change in their caseworkers until the shift occurred. P-7 stated, "We got a note on our door that she (the new worker) had come by the apartment and missed us." P-4 reported,

I didn't find out (she was getting a new worker) until after the worker left, and I had a new worker come to my door. Hearing a knock on your door and getting told that the person who was there was your new worker felt weird. How can you just trust a stranger who comes to your door and says, "Hi, I'm your new worker?"

P-7 stated,

I called the office and asked to speak to my caseworker and was told that my worker no longer worked there. I waited almost two weeks before someone dropped in to tell me that the worker was gone, and they were my new worker. All of a sudden, I had someone new come to my home and tell me she was my new worker.

Participants' feelings about their caseworker leaving were often affected by notification processes informing them that their caseworker was going as well as how the participants felt about how they were progressing toward reunification with their children. Participants were often discouraged when the new worker was unfamiliar with their case. However, in some situations, the participants perceived that their caseworker was a barrier to progress toward reunification. Based on this perception, they welcomed the change. The next theme explores perspectives of the case and how the participants perceived the progress toward reunification as well as how the participants saw the caseworker's actions or support.

Theme 5: Case Plan Changes (T)

Several participants reported that they had changes in their case plans when events occurred. P-3 stated,

My plan changed over time. After I told about my kids' dad fighting me, they wanted me to go to classes for violence. My plan changed when I got a new worker, or when there was a change. Really, they (case plans) were changed when my worker found out new information like I had a new friend, or when I got sick. They added things on my case plan about going to the doctor and taking my medicine.

The participants appeared to understand and expect changes in their plan. P-2 stated,

I had a lot of changes to my case plan. We would get new things added to our case when things happened. We had domestic violence orders, and that added things to our case plan. It seemed like we couldn't get a break. Every time we

screwed up, they were there adding things to our case plan. One thing I will say

is that the changes were in response to things that happened.

In addition to adding things to the clients' case plans, caseworkers also took

things off their client's plans as they completed services. P-4 reported,

I don't think my plan changed much. I had a long plan that had a lot of stuff on it

for me to do from the beginning. When I completed things on my plan, at the

next planning meeting, the worker would take things off my plan. I didn't have

changes in my plan (when getting a new worker). When we had our meeting, she

took things off the plan that I had finished. Having a shorter plan made me proud

because I knew how far I had made it on my plan. It made me feel good!

The remainder of the participants expressed that there were minimal changes to

case plans. P-6 stated, "There were no changes (to their case plan) after the first worker

left." Participant 8 said that their case plan was "straightforward." They reported that

they only had changed to their plan when they completed listed tasks.

Child welfare agencies determine placement and reunification based on progress

on the client's case plan. Child welfare agencies view progress as completing designated

tasks on the case plan. When clients have new items added to their plan, they often

become frustrated. Usually, these changes are made based on the progress of the client or

the completion of case plan tasks as well as new high-risk behaviors. Additionally, there

have been times where a change in caseworkers brought about changes to case plans

based on the new worker having a different opinion about the tasks a client needed to

complete to reunite with their children. However, no participants in this research

experienced a change in their case plan based strictly on the new worker's perceptions of the family being different than those of the previous worker.

Theme 6: Advice for Child Welfare Agencies

Participants in this research were very vocal about how child welfare agencies should address the problems of staff turnover. Primarily, their advice fell into two distinct categories or sub-themes. These sub-themes include the importance of the notification process when clients are facing the loss of their caseworker and reassignment to a new worker, as well as the importance of the new caseworker getting to know the client.

Subtheme: Importance of notification. Participants shared stories of their experiences with the loss of their caseworker and notification of the caseworker leaving. Several participants reported that they didn't know that their caseworker was leaving until the new caseworker knocked on their door. Meeting their new caseworker in this way was very frustrating to participants. P-1 reported,

> It would be better if we knew in advance that we were getting a new worker. I
> liked it when the supervisor and new worker called me to come in and meet with
> them (about a worker change).

Additionally, P-2 stated, "I think telling clients as soon as possible would be the best advice (for child welfare agencies)." Finally, P-4 recommended,

> The child welfare agency should send a letter out to clients when they are losing a
> worker. At least they should have the new worker come to the home with the
> worker, once the worker has decided to leave.

One participant was at a loss as to what would have helped her transition to a new worker. P-7 reported,

I don't know if they (the agency) could do anything to make having five workers easy. Maybe if I got advance notice (of a change), but really that would have just stressed me more. I don't really know what they (the agency) could do. Advance notice of a change coming, letting me have an opportunity to meet the new worker as soon as the old worker says they are leaving (may have made the changes easier).

These requests appear to be very simple for the child welfare agencies to follow; however, at times, the agencies themselves do not know in advance that they are losing a staff member. Additionally, the reassignment of a caseload can be an enormous task for the supervisor or administrator who is responsible for the cases that are left behind when a staff member leaves. Despite these challenges, it is important for the child welfare agencies to provide notification to clients in advance, when possible, and to send a letter to clients with the name of their new caseworker.

Subtheme: Getting to know the client. Another factor that could have made the transition from one caseworker to another easier is to ensure that the caseworker gets to know the client as an individual before making any decisions on the case. P-1 stated,

I think it would have helped if the third worker could have talked to the second worker. If he (the second worker) told them how good we were doing, she might have had a better outlook about us and our case. I want to tell the child welfare agency to get to know clients before deciding between them. They shouldn't just

go by what you read in a case file. Remember, people can change. Also,

everyone doesn't get things right. If they (child welfare staff) read bad things

about someone, don't believe everything they read. Give people a second chance.

Don't judge people.

While P-1 suggested that caseworkers didn't necessarily need to get to know them

by reading their case file, P-2 stated,

It may have helped if they (new workers) read my case file before they met with

me. I think it is important to give a person a chance. Get to know something

about the case before you try to take a case over. At least the basic information.

Understandably, it would be frustrating to have a new worker assigned to one's family if

the new worker were unaware of what issues the family was addressing with the agency.

P-4 stated,

If I had another worker, I would want them to hold up their end, do what they say

they are going to do, show me respect, and treat me like a human. They really

need to understand how a parent feels. Our babies are so important to us as a

parent. I think it would be good for them to know how serious and hard it is to

have a worker telling us what to do.

P-7 indicated,

How would they like having a case, their kids removed, and the loss of the one

person who was supposed to help you get your kids back? I bet they wouldn't like

that! Maybe if they did have that (several changes of workers) happen to them,

they would figure out what they were doing wrong. They don't know what they

are doing to the parents. I wish they would realize how hard it is for parents when

they get one worker after another.

These last two statements sum up how significant child welfare clients' cases are to the

clients themselves.

Participants often felt as though they were in a fight for their children. Many

struggled with the absence of their children in their home. It is the duty and obligation of

child welfare agencies and staff to treat clients with respect and to provide quality

services that help the clients address their issues to expedite reunion with their children.

Summary

In this chapter, the results of the study were reviewed to answer the research

questions for the study. The eight participants who were subjects of this study shared

their experiences with child welfare turnover and their perspectives on how the loss of the

caseworker affected their family, their case, and their case plan. Additionally, participants

shared information for child welfare agencies to help them understand how to ease the

transition from one caseworker to the next when facing turnover.

Individual interviews were used to collect data for this research. After collection

of the data, the data was hand-coded using content analysis. Key themes discovered

including the following: the effect of turnover on the outcome of the case; experiences

with loss that come with turnover; different perspectives on the case; case plan changes;

and advice for child welfare agencies.   Subthemes included delays due to turnover;

permanency; frustration with notification of a change of workers; loss of

history/knowledge of the case; getting to know the client; and the importance of advance

notice of a change of worker. Moving forward to chapter 5, I further discuss the themes

and subthemes discovered in the data. Limitations and implications of the study, as well

as recommendations for further study, follow the discussion of themes and subthemes.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of child welfare clients when faced with the loss of their caseworker due to staff turnover. I recruited former child welfare clients through flyers posted in two communities, as well as snowball sampling. Each of these former clients experienced the removal of their children as well as the loss of their caseworker a minimum of three times. The goal of this research was to explore child welfare clients' experiences with turnover and to develop an understanding of how the clients perceived that the loss of their caseworker impacted their case. I used individual interviews with the participants who contacted me and met the screening criteria.

I completed the interviews in the individual's community at the local library. However, one individual completed a Skype interview. The interviews were conducted with an interview guide, using open-ended questions. The answers were recorded on a voice recorder and transcribed. The participants received their transcriptions for member checking. There were no suggested corrections for the transcripts. The coding process of the transcripts occurred after the transcripts were approved. I interpret the findings in this chapter, as well as discuss the connection to the theoretical framework of the study, the limitations of the study, the recommendations for further research, and the implications for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

The participants expressed their perceptions of how staff turnover affected their child welfare case. The results reflect the information shared by participants, as well as key literature findings related to child welfare turnover. The interpreted sentiments of the participants for each research question are below.

Research Question 1

Bîrneanu (2014) found that changes in caseworkers brought about feelings of instability and uncertainty. Common themes in the literature included a loss of trust as well as a loss of a trusting relationship (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010); frustration with the loss of knowledge about their situation when receiving a new caseworker (Augsberger & Swenson, 2015); and feelings of grief, loss, and anger (Schofield et al., 2011). These three themes were evident in this study.

Themes that answered research question one included (a) the effect of turnover on the outcome of the case, (b) loss that comes with turnover, and (c) different perspectives. The participants frequently described feeling confused or uncertain about what was going to happen with their child welfare case. The loss of their caseworker appeared to be the loss of a lifeline to their children removed from their home. The delay in notification concerning the loss of their workers was also challenging to cope with, as the participants described fear and uncertainty about who was going to be their new caseworker and whether they could work positively with the newly assigned caseworker.

Additionally, participants shared feelings of loss as they faced child welfare caseworker turnover. Those participants who had a positive relationship with their

caseworker seemed to experience feelings of abandonment and frustration. Participants for this study expressed displeasure with having to retell the story of their case and rehash family history that brought them to the attention of the agency. Although most participants were able to manage their frustration with turnover, more than one participant expressed feelings of being defeated and giving up on reunification with their children. There was a hint of bitterness by some.

However, some participants viewed turnover as an opportunity to turn their case around. This was particularly true when the participants did not like their previous worker or perceived that the former worker was not supportive of them. Some participants felt as though the change in caseworkers did not affect the long-term outcome of their cases. Additionally, several of the participants reported that they thought that their new caseworkers needed to get to know them as an individual, not just the person described in their case file. However, other participants complained that their new worker never read their case file and had little to no knowledge of the issues or struggles that they had faced as a client.

In regard to reunification, some participants felt that the loss of their caseworker had negative consequences. Participants who were unable to reunite with their children expressed feelings that the caseworker was at fault when the court would not allow them to reunite. However, one individual reported that they were relieved that they would never have to deal with child welfare agencies again because they did not have any children in their custody.

Although some participants had negative experiences with their caseworker, some participants experienced a positive relationship with their caseworker. P-4 stated, "I had someone who believed in me and gave me credit for everything I had done." P-8 reported, "No one wants a CPS case, but if you have to have one, these were the kind of people I would want to be my worker." Furthermore, P-5 stated, "I was lucky I got good workers." Participants described both positive and negative experiences, as often the positivity and negativity of turnover were situational, based on the caseworker who was assigned, the caseworker's "fit" with the personality of family members, and the current situation with the family. When families were experiencing events that were concerning to the child welfare agency, participants were more likely to have negative experiences or thoughts about the change of workers at that time in their lives.

Exploring the question of how child welfare clients perceived the loss of their ongoing caseworker, it is clear that the change was traumatic for some clients in specific situations. However, at times, turnover was a positive thing for some clients, as they felt that the change gave them a second chance that they would not have had with their previous caseworker. Despite this positive spin on child welfare turnover, however, many clients experienced frustration and a sense of instability due to the multiple changes.

The importance of trust was also a consideration for the participants. Half of the participants in this study indicated that they had trust issues with their caseworker. Some believed that lack of trust on the part of the worker toward them resulted in a reciprocal loss of trust in the worker. It is imperative that the caseworker and the child welfare

agency understand the importance of a trusting relationship between their clients and the staff. This is consistent with Schofield (2010) and Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2010), who found that trust between clients and their caseworkers is essential for a positive, helping relationship. It is imperative that child welfare agencies explore methods to decrease staff turnover in the child welfare workforce as well as work on techniques to help clients build trust in their caseworker and the agency.

Research Question 2

The child welfare case plan is considered a roadmap for clients to negotiate with child welfare agencies to ensure the safety, stability, and wellbeing of the children and families served (Iowa, 2008). The theme that answered this question involved case plan changes. The roles of the client and caseworker are integral parts of the case planning process, which can be achieved by respect and family-centered services (Lietz, 2011; Michalopoulos et al., 2012; Mirick, 2013). Family input into the case plan and the case planning process is essential to the family feeling empowered and in control of their child welfare case (D'Andrade & Huong, 2014). Additionally, child welfare agencies should maintain a strengths-based perspective rather than a compliance-focused approach to services related to case planning (Mirick, 2013).

It appeared that participants perceived that many of the services on the case plans were unnecessary and redundant. Some participants reported that they were requested to complete a variety of assessments that resulted in a finding that the client did not need the related services. P-5 stated,

She (worker) asked the court to order me to finish the classes that the assessments

said I didn't need, and the court said I could finish, but I didn't have to finish

them. The worker had me doing every kind of counseling that you can do.

These case plans did not include collaboration with the families, which allows family

members the opportunity to share in the development of their case plan.

Many participants reported that they were frustrated when caseworkers added new

tasks to their case plan. However, several participants acknowledged that new tasks on

their plan were in response to events that occurred in their life while the child welfare

case was open. Adding items to a family's case plan appeared to have occurred

frequently with the participants in this study. However, many participants did report that

they had items removed from their case plans as they completed tasks on their plan.

A significant issue with case planning is that of perspectives of progress

(Featherstone & Fraser, 2012). There have been potential problems with child welfare

plans when the caseworker and the client have different perspectives of progress on their

case plan. A difference in perspectives can bring about barriers to a positive working

relationship between the caseworker and the client (Schofield et al., 2011).

Participants had different perspectives of the case planning process. Many felt

that the requirements for their case plan were unnecessary, redundant, or ineffective for

their situation. Additionally, there were concerns expressed about the difference in

perspectives of clients and their caseworkers. Understanding these concerns leaves me

with two suggestions for caseworkers when developing case plans with clients: (a) allow

clients the opportunity to develop their case plan with their caseworker as opposed to

being handed a case plan that the caseworker wrote for the family instead of with the family and (b) ensure that the client and the caseworker are clear on what they perceive as successful completion of their case plan tasks. Setting clear expectations for both the client and the caseworker will help to alleviate any confusion regarding progress on the tasks that clients are asked to complete and on their case plan.

Research Question 3

Individuals need certain things within a working relationship for that relationship to be effective. Themes related to this question included (a) frustration with notification of change and (b) advice for child welfare agencies. For child welfare clients to have a positive working relationship with their caseworker, they need to feel comfortable as well as if they are in a partnership, as opposed to a one-sided relationship (Schofield et al., 2011; Slettebo, 2013). These clients also need their caseworker to be respectful, nonjudgmental, empathetic, supportive, helpful, and attuned to their needs as a client (De Boer & Coady, 2007). Child welfare clients want to have the feeling that they are in control of their lives and the lives of their children, without feeling as though they are powerless and left without a voice (Schofield et al., 2011).

There were a variety of needs of child welfare clients discussed during the interview phase of this study. Participants had clear ideas on how child welfare agencies can make child welfare turnover much easier for clients. Most participants in this study expressed frustration with the notification process or the lack of consistency with the process for notification of a change in caseworkers. They shared feelings that a lack of notification of a change in caseworkers was a significant problem with child welfare

agencies. Experiences ranged from being verbally told of an impending change to learning that a new worker was assigned when they initially came to participant's door for a home visit. The surprise visits made clients feel disrespected.

Participants also stated that they thought that meeting the new worker in advance would help the transition over to a new caseworker. When an advance meeting occurs, the stress of getting a new worker is minimized, according to participants. However, if an advance meeting is not possible, participants reported that receiving a letter with the name of the new worker would also be helpful. The participants did not like to be surprised that they were getting a new caseworker by having the caseworker show up at the door without notice.

In speaking with the participants about child welfare turnover, many participants expressed frustration with the repeated loss of their caseworker, the delays turnover brought about, or the loss of information on their case when their worker left. Additionally, retelling the family's story to the new workers was frustrating. Participants from this research believed that these issues need to be addressed by child welfare agencies.

The thought that the child welfare agency should do something about the problem of turnover was evident. One participant thought that decreasing caseloads or perhaps doing something about the court system and the extended time spent in court would prevent caseworkers from leaving. In addition to suggesting that child welfare agencies reduce caseloads and shorten court times for staff, participants had other suggestions for child welfare agencies and staff to ease their discomfort with staff turnover.

It appeared essential to participants that there was a smooth transition from one caseworker to the next. Participants reported that clients want a new worker who is familiar with the issues that the family is facing. They wanted the new worker to have read their case file but did not want them to take everything in the record as accurate. There was a clear theme that clients needed the new caseworker to approach their case with an open mind and to take the opportunity to get to know the family themselves, and not just go by the opinions of previous workers or the information in the case file. Clients want to be respected and to feel empowered by the child welfare agency. They want a positive relationship with their caseworker and the child welfare agency.

Child welfare services are not optional. Families involved with child welfare agencies receive services based on a need for those services. If the services offered were voluntary, clients could opt out if they were dissatisfied with the attention that they were receiving. That is not an option with this population. Because child welfare clients are receiving mandated services, child welfare agencies have the responsibility to provide quality services that meet the needs of the family and to do so courteously and respectfully.

Connection to Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study came from systems theory. The concept behind systems theory is that every entity is a part of a more extensive system (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Kamenopoulou, 2016). Changes within the system have an effect on other parts of the system as a whole. When applying systems theory to family perceptions of staff turnover in child welfare agencies, it is important to explore

the larger systems, the macrosystem and the mesosystem, and how changes in those systems affect the microsystem or the individual client or their family.

Local child welfare agencies are a part of a much larger system, with each local agency having its unique struggles. The participants from this study were affected by the turnover at the local level. As caseworkers left their regional child welfare offices, they created a void in the system or an imbalance in the homeostasis of the more extensive child welfare system. This imbalance trickled down to the individuals and families working with the local agencies when they lost their caseworker.

Symptoms of this imbalance in the homeostasis of the local child welfare agency occurred when clients failed to receive timely notification that their caseworker was leaving, or when they faced multiple incidents of losing their caseworker. Additionally, although many individuals and families may not have directly experienced the loss of their caseworker, there is likely some effect on the loss of a peer of their caseworker, as when one caseworker leaves, peers often have to assume their cases. The result is that caseworkers have more work and less time to spend with their clients.

In the research questions for this study, I explored the clients' perceptions of how instability in their child welfare agency has long-term outcomes for the microsystem or the individuals within the family system. Findings from this study are consistent with systems theory and demonstrate how one system can bring about change on another system. When the child welfare system changed, the family faced adjusting to that change. Many participants struggled with the changes in the system.

Several participants indicated that they experienced changes to their case plan based on events that occurred within their family or their lives. Adjustments are consistent with systems theory, as when the client had an incident that occurred in their lives, they had a change in their case plan. Those changes in their case plans, in turn, brought about changes in their lives in the form of additional services or tasks added to their case plan. As new services appeared on their case plan, the family's system grew, based on new services and providers working with the family.

Just as the family system grew and changed when new events occurred in the family's lives, the child welfare system was also ever-evolving. As one worker departed the agency, the agency had to deal with the loss of that worker and his or her knowledge and experience. Additionally, when a caseworker left the agency, they also left behind fellow caseworkers who had to pick up other cases in the original worker's caseload. The new worker brought new perspectives to the family, which in turn affected the family in a variety of ways. The cycle of change in the systems of the agency as well as the family appeared to be perpetual and ever-changing.

There is a significant focus on how general systems affect child welfare services. However, there is a correlation between systems theory, the person in the environment, and perspectives when providing child welfare services (Kondrat, 2002). The concept of the person in the environment explores how the person, or in this case, the child welfare client, engages with their environment, and how the environment shapes their perspectives and actions (Kivnick, Jefferys, & Heier, 2003). Clients may face both positive and negative attributes within their environment. However, clients' individual

strengths, as well as the strengths of the clients' support system, impact how they react to negative attributes within this environment.

Looking at child welfare services through the lens of the patient and consumer satisfaction based on Pascoe (1984) and Gerkensmeyer, Austin, and Miller (2006), there are opportunities to improve services for child welfare clients. Under the premise that clients can determine the quality of services that they received, and that they have the ability to express their preferences and desires for services, child welfare clients exercise their voices (Pascoe, 1984; Gerkensmeyer, Austin, & Miller, 2006).

This study provided a small opportunity for clients to share their experiences with child welfare turnover, and how the turnover affected their satisfaction of services. It is essential for child welfare clients to have an opportunity to express their satisfaction with services, as well as for these clients to use their voices to improve services. Assessment of child welfare services is vital to the quality of services, and the best avenue for this assessment is to provide opportunities for clients to use their voices to bring about change. If child welfare agencies would provide their clients with a voice, it would empower clients while also helping the child welfare agency remain focused on quality services.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are a normal part of the research process. It is impossible to conduct research with live participants and not experience limitations. There are several limitations present in this current research study. General qualitative research studies typically have smaller sample sizes than quantitative research (Mason, 2010; Moser &

Korstjens, 2018). The sample size for this research study involved eight participants from two geographic areas of the state. Perhaps research with a broader population, or in other parts of the country, could provide additional insight into child welfare turnover.

Additionally, there was a gender disparity, as this study had predominantly female participants, with only one male participant. Gathering a more balanced demographic sample would address this issue. Furthermore, the addition of various ethnicities for the study could have resulted in greater transferability to the general population.

Another limitation of the study was the involvement of former child welfare clients. These individuals were relying on recollections or memories of the facts of their case, whereas current clients would have had fresher, more recent memories. The original plan was to interview current clients. However, the statewide agency would not approve involvement with existing clients.

Recommendations for Future Research

Through this research, I explored parental perspectives on how child welfare staff turnover affected the client's case. Future research should examine the effect of staff turnover in child welfare agencies from the viewpoint of former young adults in foster care who are in the state-managed independent living programs. These young adults often have no family to reunite with, and their view of how the loss of their caseworker impacted them would add to the research on child welfare staff turnover.

A future study opportunity would be to explore foster parents' experiences with child welfare turnover. These caregivers' viewpoints on how turnover affects the children placed in their home, as well as services for these children, would be valuable to

gain greater insight into the problems of child welfare staff turnover. There is minimal research involving foster parents and the impact of child welfare staff turnover.

Significantly, three out of eight parents who were involved in this study were unable to reunite with their children. More information is needed to determine if there is a correlation between staff turnover and failure for parents to reunite with their children. A quantitative correlational study is recommended to determine the data related to the relationship between the termination of parental rights or reunification and the number of caseworkers assigned to the case. The results of this qualitative study might be valuable to other welfare agencies, as the research provides insight into what child welfare clients need when facing turnover.

Further research on parental perspectives of loss of a family's caseworker in other communities in the state or across the country would also be beneficial. Additional information would provide global insight into this phenomenon and allow child welfare agencies to understand how turnover impact the clients they serve. Additionally, probing child welfare clients about what they believe child welfare agencies need to know about them or what clients think the agencies should do differently will allow agencies to look at their policies and procedures from a parental perspective.

Implications for Social Change

There is a large volume of research related to child welfare caseworker turnover, including research involving why caseworkers leave, why they stay and how the loss of caseworkers affects child welfare agencies (Collins-Camargo et al., 2012; Flower et al., 2005; Shim, 2014; Skoog et al., 2015; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010; Tripp et al., 2014).

However, there is no existing research from the client's perspective on how this turnover affects the parents, the children, and the family system. The findings of this study may contribute to the literature on child welfare turnover from a different perspective, that of the consumers of child welfare services. This study has the potential to impact individuals, families, communities, and child welfare agencies.

Listening and beginning to develop an understanding of how clients perceive child welfare turnover provides a chance to see inside the services child welfare agencies provide. The study provides insight into how clients experience child welfare services and is intended to help child welfare agencies deliver better services to clients. The participants in this study strongly expressed a desire for child welfare agencies to fix the problem of staff turnover in their agencies. Additionally, the study provided an opportunity for child welfare clients to have a voice and an opportunity to tell child welfare agencies what they needed from them when facing the loss of their caseworkers. Child welfare staff and administrators have the opportunity to utilize the advice and suggestions from the participants to enhance their services, as well as to provide a higher level of satisfaction with services for clients.

The information in this study provides an opportunity to enhance the knowledge of caseworkers and child welfare agencies in regard to clients' perspectives of their services. The study contributes to the knowledge base related to child welfare services as well as child welfare turnover. Policy makers and practitioners have the opportunity to utilize this research to explore their procedures for managing child welfare caseloads and the subsequent reassignment of cases when they are losing staff. Finally, child welfare

clients would benefit from this research when agencies are more aware of the needs of the family when facing child welfare turnover.

Conclusion

This final chapter provided insight into the findings of the study. Additionally, it contains a discussion of the connections to the theoretical framework, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. Finally, an examination of the implications for positive social change completes the study.

This basic qualitative study explored the experiences of eight former child welfare clients from two geographic areas of KY. All of the participants had their children removed from their care and experienced multiple losses of their caseworkers due to staff turnover. This study explored their perceptions and experiences of how this turnover affected them, their families, and their child welfare case.

The findings of this study confirmed that child welfare families are affected by staff turnover within the agencies providing services. The participants in this study expressed a desire for child welfare agencies to address the issue of turnover. Additionally, they recommended that child welfare agencies develop a system of notification when a caseworker is leaving the agency, and ultimately, the family. Finally, I recommend that agencies ensure that caseworkers get to know their new clients before the initiation of services. Learning more about what clients need may help to enhance client satisfaction.

Child welfare agencies must acknowledge that there is a problem with staff turnover and take measures to address that turnover. This research clarifies how clients

perceive turnover and provides suggestions for improvement of the child welfare system. Although child welfare agencies may have other more, significant means of adjusting their policies, the recommendations included from the participants of this study give insight into what is important to former child welfare clients. It is highly likely that current child welfare clients share the same need to be treated with dignity and respect, and for continuity of services from their child welfare agency. They have spoken, and child welfare agencies should listen.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

ATTENTION FORMER CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE (CPS)
CLIENTS WITH CLOSED CASES:

My name is Linda Sanders, and I am a student at Walden University, working on my Ph.D. in Human Services. I have worked in the Kentucky Child welfare system in various capacities over the past 20 years. I am conducting research on the problems parents like yourselves faced when your CPS social worker left the agency. I want to know more about your experiences and how these changes affected you and your case planning.

Who is eligible to participate in the study?

Parent of a child who was in foster care, with a closed case, who experienced the loss of your child welfare worker at least two or three times while your case was open, are eligible to participate in the study.

What is involved in your participation?

A 60-90-minute interview will take place at your local library, or by telephone or Skype. You will receive a $10.00 Kroger card or e-gift card for participation.

Contact me at: Facebook at *Child Welfare Turnover* or by e-mail at

Childwelfareturnover@gmail.com.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol Worksheet

A. Overall experience with child welfare worker turnover

   1. Can you tell me how many caseworkers you had assigned to your child welfare case?

   2. Thinking back to the first caseworker that left, what were your reactions when that worker left your case?

   3. Now thinking back to the next caseworker who left, were your reactions the same as to the departure of the previous caseworker? If not, how were they different?

   4. Once you had experienced at least three caseworkers, tell me your thoughts about future case workers.

   5. In addition to caseworker changes, did you also experience changes at the supervisory level for your case? If so, tell me about that.

B. Notification of child welfare worker leaving

   1. How did you find out that the first worker was leaving your case, or that you were getting a new caseworker?

   2. How far in advance did the child welfare agency notify you of the change?

   3. How did you find out that your second worker was leaving your case, or that you were getting another worker?

   4. How far in advance did the child welfare agency notify you of the change?

   5. Can you tell me your experiences with any other caseworkers leaving?

C. Short- and Long-Term Effect on the Case

1. Now looking back at your permanency planning process, how do you think your child welfare worker leaving affected your permanency plan or case plan?

2. How do you think your first caseworker leaving changed your case, including your visitation, case plan and/or court orders?

3. What type of changes did you notice in your case when other caseworkers left your case?

D. How to Make the Transition Easier

1. Did you have one experience of a change in workers that was better than the others? Can you tell me about that? What made it better?

2. Did you have one experience of a change in workers that was worse than the others? Can you tell me about that? What made it worse?

3. How could the agency have made the change in case workers easier for you?

4. If you had the opportunity to tell child welfare workers, supervisors, and administrators how to manage the variety of issues staff turnover brought about, and make it easier for parents, what would you tell them?

Appendix C: Screening Criteria Tool

Screening Criteria
Are you a parent of a child formerly in foster care in Kentucky?
Is your child welfare or CPS case closed?
Did you experience the loss of your ongoing case worker more than two times?
Are you over the age of 18?

Appendix D: Exit Flyer

Thank you for your participation in my research. I appreciate your time spent sharing your experiences with child welfare services. A summary of the findings of my research will be posted on my Facebook page *Child Welfare Turnover*. Additionally, if you have any questions, you can contact me by e-mail at: Childwelfareturnover@gmail.com

The office phone number for the Ombudsman's office is 1-800-372-2973.

Participants may also contact the Walden University research participant advocate by phone or e-mail if there are concerns with the research process. The advocate can be reached at 1-612-312-1210 or by e-mail at IRB@mail.waldenu.edu.

I understand that while discussing your family and your closed child welfare agency case you may have become emotional. Help is available to you in your community. Your area community mental health center is available to provide mental health services for individuals who are experiencing difficult times or who are in crisis. The number for your area is below:

Boone, Kenton, & Campbell Counties   Jefferson County
North Key Community Care Network   Centerstone of Kentucky
24-hour Crisis Line   24-hour Crisis Line
1-877-331-3292   1-800-221-0446

If you reside in another area, please let me know. I will provide you with a local resource.