

ABSTRACT

FOSTER PARENTS PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS THAT LEAD TO PLACEMENT BREAKDOWN

One of the most prevalent issues in the child welfare system is the number of foster children experiencing multiple placements. Children experience a lack of stability as a result of multiple placements, which also puts them at risk for other long-term psychological effects. While research has been conducted on the factors that contribute to placement breakdown, there have been very few studies utilizing foster parents as the primary source for data collection. Utilizing a phenomenological approach with current and former foster parents in the California's Central Valley, this study explored the factors that contribute to placement breakdown. The findings indicate that the most significant factors that lead to placement breakdown are behaviors of the foster care child(ren), safety concerns, foster parent feelings of distress, hopelessness, and a lack of resources. The problem of not interviewing foster parent in studies that attempt to identify the factors that contribute to placement breakdown leaves foster children in the cycle of experiencing multiple placements in foster care, consequently leading to long-term effects. In the effort to determine the factors that contribute to placement breakdown, studies must include the perceptions of foster parents as they are the caregivers experiencing the phenomenon.

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FOSTER PARENTS PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS THAT LEAD
TO PLACEMENT BREAKDOWN

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The number of children in foster care in the United States exceeds 400,000. While there are numerous concerns in the child welfare system, one of the most prevalent issues is the number of children in foster care who experience multiple placements. There have been studies conducted on the issue and, over time, it has been a concern that children who experience placement breakdown may potentially develop detrimental long-term psychological effects. This study gathered information from foster parents, who have experienced placement breakdown, in an attempt to get their perspective as to the factors that contribute to placement breakdown in foster care.

Identification of the Problem

Number of Children Entering Foster Care

One of the major problems the child welfare system in the United States faces is the sheer number of children entering the foster care system. The variety of data regarding children entering the foster care system over the years is concerning. In 2006, it was estimated that 510,885 children had been placed in the foster care system in the United States (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2015). While this has been the highest number of children in foster care, the number of children in foster care in recent years is still alarming. The lowest number of children in foster care was in 2012, with 397,091 children (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2015). Unfortunately, in 2013, the number of children entering the foster care system increased to 402,172 (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2015).

In 2006, while the nation as a whole was experiencing a high volume of children entering the system, California alone had 78,373 children enter the foster care system. In the most recent years, that number has not been surpassed in California. The lowest number of foster care children in California was in 2012, with 54,288 children in foster care (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2015). In 2013, the numbers once again increased, as it was estimated that 56,577 children entered the foster care system in California.

Children Experiencing Multiple Placements

In 2006, it was estimated that 205,316 children in foster care experienced more than two placements (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2015). Between 2006 and 2008, the number of children experiencing more than two placements in foster care remained relatively stable, yet high, increasing from 40% to 41%. In 2013, the percentage was decreased to an estimated 35%, to which is still equivalent to 139,913 children experiencing more than two placement changes (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2015).

The children in foster care in California experience a higher percentage rate of multiple placements. In 2006, it was estimated that 34,212 children in foster care experienced more than two placements in California. This percentage was stable at 44% for the next 3 years (National Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2015). In 2013, the number of children experiencing multiple placements in California had declined, but was still significant and was estimated to be 20,511 (National Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2015).

These data demonstrate that the number of children in foster care experiencing multiple placements is of concern. While some studies have been conducted on the issue, few studies have been conducted using foster parents as

participants. The perceptions of foster parents are essential when attempting to identify the factors that contribute to multiple placements, for they are intimately involved in the process of placement change. The problem of not interviewing foster parents to determine the factors that influence multiple placements results in a lack of data to remedy the problem. This is to the detriment of children and leaves foster children in the continuing vicious cycle of experiencing multiple placements in foster care, with no stability. Consequently, they experience lifelong negative consequences.

Foster care homes consist of group homes, pre-adoptive homes, foster homes (non-relative), and relative placement homes (National Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2015). Of the many components of the foster care system, the multiple placements children experience is an area of serious concern. The alarming concern with multiple placements is that the lack of stability places the child at risk for complications with brain growth, psychological adjustment, and mental development (Eggertsen, 2008). Some of the areas at risk are essential for the development of a child. The instability caused by multiple placements in foster care has created many negative outcomes in children that have experienced multiple placement breakdowns that last well beyond their time in foster care and are detrimental to them and society as a whole.

Negative Outcomes

Adults who were placed in foster care as children have been interviewed about their experiences of multiple placements and have demonstrated that the effects have been both detrimental and long lasting. Interviewees were consistent with describing their experiences with distress (Unrau, Seita, & Putney, 2008). The trauma they experienced can easily become problematic into their adulthood.

The long-term effects caused by the trauma of multiple placements demonstrated that these individuals in adulthood had difficulties establishing safe relationships, transitioning, and the managing their mental health problems (Unrau et al., 2008). Subsequently, studies demonstrated that the behaviors and trauma developed in foster care many times remain untreated.

Complications most often seen in foster care children who have experienced multiple placements include internalizing and externalizing problems. Internalized problems emerge from anxiety and depression (Gabrielli, Jackson, & Brown, 2014). The constant movement from home to home creates an unstable environment for the child and is a breeding ground for later problems. An unstable placement deprives the child of the opportunity of forming healthy relationships. Many children have no idea how to develop healthy relationships in that environment. Understandably, the fear of not knowing when or where their next placement will be can cause the child to worry and feel nervous. Externalizing problems include hyperactivity, aggression, behavioral problems (Gabrielli et al., 2014). All of those problems have far-reaching consequences during the entire lifetime of the foster child. Based on research conducted, behavioral problems amongst foster care children have been the leading factor for their multiple placements.

Statement of the Problem

There are several contributing factors to placement breakdown amongst children placed in foster care. It has been identified that the factors for the cause of multiple placements are minor health problems, mental health issues, delinquency and sexual abuse (Eggertsen, 2008). While information about these factors has traditionally been gathered through the data of child welfare agencies, the factors

identified through the perception of the foster parents are different. Information gathered after the fact through agency data may not paint the whole picture regarding the actual reasons for placement breakdown. A qualitative analysis study on the perception of the foster parents it was identified that the lack of knowledge about the child's needs, the insufficient understanding of the placement process, the relationship with the social worker, and the lack of individualized services were influences for placement change (Khoo & Skoog, 2014). Notable literature is based mostly on the data collected using the documentation of social welfare agencies, rather than the foster parents themselves. To gather a better understanding of all the possible factors that contribute to the multiple placements in foster care, all associated factors must be researched to gain a comprehensive understanding of the problem. Foster parents are essential in the study of factors that contribute to multiple placements because they were directly involved with the foster children. There is a definite need to conduct further research studies using primary data from caretakers to define the factors that contribute for multiple placements in their home (Eggertsen, 2008). The perspective of caregivers must be taken into consideration when identifying the factors that lead to the removal of children from one foster home to another.

Theoretical Conceptualization

A phenomenology approach was used for this research study. The foundation for this study emerged from the study of Evelyn Khoo and Viktoria Skoog on the study conducted to gain the perceptions of foster parents and their experience of the events of placement breakdown. For this study, data was collected from foster parents through face-to-face interviews. The target sample was foster care parents who have previously experienced at least one placement

breakdown. The research instrument that was used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. Content analysis was conducted on the data that was collected.

Research Questions

The study focuses on obtaining the perceptions of foster care parents on the factors that contribute to placement breakdown. The interviews were semi-structured. The two primary question of interest for this study are:

- Can you help me understand the situation that led to the/each placement breakdown?
- Can you describe the factors that you believed contributed to the/each placement breakdown?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions foster care parents have as to the factors that led to placement breakdown. There is research on the documented reasons given when being removed from one home to another (Eggertsen, 2008). However, that research did not gather data directly from the foster parent who experienced placement breakdown. Further research is needed in getting the perception of the actual foster care parents and the factors that contributed to their decision to seek a placement change. Therefore, it can be concluded that there has been very little research conducted on the foster parents' perception in regards to the factors that led to placement breakdown (Khoo & Skoog, 2014). Consequently, at present, there is not enough information to determine all the factors that cause multiple placements in foster homes. By analyzing the themes that foster parents report to being the contributing factors to

placement breakdown, an understanding of the factors that contribute to multiple factors from the perspective of foster care parents will be gained.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The impact on this study amongst the social work practice is seen at the micro, mezzo, and macro practice. The National Association of Social Work (NASW) implements core ethical value of service (NASW, 2008). The core value of service suggests that social workers use their knowledge to address social problems to help those in need. The implication for social work practice within this problem starts at the micro level. Social workers are the case managers having direct contact with the children in foster care. Social workers are valuable to this research, for they are the ones removing and placing children in foster care homes.

At the mezzo level, social workers can implement their practice skill in identifying the community factors that contribute to the cause of multiple placements. Social workers can determine if the resources currently provided to foster parents within the child welfare system are sufficient when placing children that have been exposed to traumatic experiences. Research conducted on foster care parents who received training on ways to address behavioral issues amongst children placed in their home suggested that those children are less likely to be removed (Price et al., 2008). At this level, the social worker can identify the community resources needed for a child that is being placed from one foster care home to another to prevent a negative outcome and give the child the best chance of success. The social worker must not only determine the needs but take action by advocating for the implementation of those resources.

At the macro level, the social worker identifies the broader issues that multiple placements in foster care can generate. An issue discussed amongst the

literature is the impact of the health care cost from individuals who had multiple placements as a minor in foster care (Rubin et al., 2004). Children that develop behavioral issues are quite likely to have a need for mental health services, therefore, affecting the annual expenditure for Medicaid (Rubin et al., 2004). In a study of 1710 children who in foster care, it was estimated that 83% of the sample, generated \$2.4 million in mental health costs (Rubin et al., 2004). This problem is present at the international level indicating it is a very widespread problem.

In a study conducted in England, researchers estimated that out of the 60,300 children placed in their child welfare care system, only 51% of the foster placements met the criteria for stability in placement (Rostill-Brookes, Larkin, Toms, & Churchman, 2011). The identification of multiple placements among foster care children in England identifies that this issue should be of concern to social workers and their agencies. The high rates of foster home breakdown should be of concern when it has been identified that the problem exists not only in local communities but has been identified as a significant problem internationally as well. The problem of placement breakdown extends, at times, well beyond from the foster child and foster parent. Khoo and Skoog (2008) identified that the breakdown of foster care placements should be analyzed as a complex process rather than a single event.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical framework for this research study will be general systems theory. General systems theory analyzes interactions between systems and defines how each system determines the interaction (Brandell, 2011). In the attempt to understand the factors that contribute to placement breakdown from the foster parents' perception, a theoretical framework is needed. The theory purposes to

understand the different system of interactions the foster parents have and the level of input each system has in regards to their support for foster parents. Systems theory can be applied at different social system levels.

The different social system levels around foster parents are the micro, mezzo, and macro level. The micro level is the small-size social system (Brandell, 2011). Social workers can be categorized in this area when identifying the micro level systems, a foster parent has. The mezzo level systems are support networks and extended family (Brandell, 2011). Community agencies where families are referred to would be considered mezzo level systems. Macro level systems are larger systems, such as organizations (Brandell, 2011). The department of social services is considered one macro level system connected with foster families.

The perceptions of foster parents may be different in regards to their reasons for placement breakdown; their responses will be analyzed using the theoretical framework of systems theory. The implementation of general system theory will evaluate how the foster parents identify and effectively used support systems. This research further explored how foster parents identified support systems and if any played a factor in placement breakdown.

Summary

This chapter introduces the area of focus for this research, defines the problem statement and identifies the purpose of this study. The literature review will further explain the problem statement. Also, a literature review explores the various study methods used to explain the factors that contribute to placement breakdown in foster care. Finally, a critical analysis of the theoretical framework for this study will be examined.

Definitions

Some of the terms used in this study are defined below.

A *child* is an individual under the age of 18 years (California Judicial Council, 2016).

Foster care refers to out-of-home care provided to children who are dependents of the court (Welfare and Institutions Code, 1980).

A *foster home* is a licensed family residence in which 24-hour care is provided to a minor (Welfare and Institutions Code, 1980).

A *group home* is a non-detention residential home (Welfare and Institutions Code, 1980).

Kinship denotes a family relationship. In kinship care, a minor is placed in the care of an adult related to the child (California Judicial Council, 2016).

Notify means to inform, either orally or in writing (California Judicial Council, 2016).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examined empirical and theoretical research specific to foster care placement breakdown. The studies reviewed used a variety of research methods to analyze the factors that contribute to placement breakdown in foster care. The literature includes secondary data studies, mixed-methods studies, meta-analyses, longitudinal studies, prospective studies, and intervention studies. In addition to examining factors in foster care placement breakdown, the review identified and reviewed the gaps in the literature.

This review explored the origins and development of the factors that contribute to the multiple placements of foster children from both a theoretical and an empirical perspective. The theoretical literature provided a foundation for the research in generally accepted social welfare thought; the empirical literature presented findings from the most current studies conducted on foster placements that give an understanding of the dynamics that influence multiple placements in foster care homes. The literature reviews also clarified the importance of the research problem and presented the need for further research on the issue. The primary focuses of the studies selected for review were the factors that contribute to placement disruptions, the behavioral issues foster care children demonstrate due to multiple placements and perceptions of foster parents regarding the factors that contribute to multiple placements.

Notification of Intent to Move Foster Child

Children who are dependents of the court are generally placed in foster homes. Sometimes the court determines that a child who has been placed in a foster home should be taken out of that home. Before a governmental agency can remove the child from the care of foster parents, the agency is required to issue a

written notice to the foster parents of the intent to remove the child from their care at least 7 days in advance of the move (Department of Child and Family Services [DCFS], n.d.). The agency is not required to give notice of intent to remove the child if the child is in danger, a signed waiver of the requirement has been provided by the foster parent, a court has ordered the removal, or licensing, or certification issues render the foster parent unqualified to continue to provide services. Notice is not required if the child's parent or guardian voluntarily placed the child with the foster parent and now wants the child removed or if the child is to be moved from an emergency placement (DCFS, n.d.).

Instability in Foster Care

Placement instability in the foster care system has intrigued many researchers. The identification of instability can further lead to the identification of the factors that create placement breakdown in foster care. Instability in foster care has been linked to, caregivers' commitment, the absence of a child's mental health diagnosis and placement with a relative caregiver (Koh, Rolock, Cross, & Eblen-Manning, 2013). Using data from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Koh et al. (2013) compared children who were considered to have stability in foster care with children who had experienced multiple moves over an 18-month period. The researchers identified relative placement as a factor in placement stability; the stable group of children in the study had spent a large portion of the time with a relative caregiver. The caregivers' commitment to legal permanence was also a factor distinguishing stability in foster care from multiple foster care placements. Finally, the researchers reported that a large percentage of the children who experienced a number of moves had been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder.

Patterns of instability in foster care are also of concern in regions of the world outside the United States. Ward (2009) studied the pattern of instability amongst 242 children in the foster care system in England. The researcher found multiple patterns of instability in foster care, multiple needs of the children, and multiple numbers of placements. More than half of the children in the study displayed emotional or behavioral difficulties. Ward reported that the children in the study needed support because of a conviction offense or because of learning or physical disability. In the 3.5-year period of the study, 53 children had experienced more than 5 placements; one person reported experiencing 29 placements (Ward, 2009).

The Importance of Placement Stability in Foster Care

Children in the foster care system are at risk for disadvantages that impact their mental health (Hillen & Gafson, 2015). A study conducted in London with 43 pre-school children placed in foster care identified several factors that put a child at risk of developing mental health disorders both before entering foster care and during the foster care placement (Hillen & Gafson, 2015). The researchers reported that children who enter foster care over the age of 6 months and children who experience multiple types of maltreatment were at risk for developing mental health disorders. The researchers also demonstrated that children in foster who experience multiple placements are at higher risk of having a mental health disorder.

Empirical Literature

There have been several study methods used to identify the factors that contribute multiple placements in foster care. The empirical literature review

provides an analysis of the various study methods that have been used study the phenomenon of placement breakdown.

Factors in Multiple Placements Identified in Secondary Data Studies

The literature contains studies that examined secondary data to determine the factors that are associated with multiple foster care placements and how they are associated. Some factors emerged. Eggertsen (2008) obtained data from 6,432 children who were placed by the Utah Division of Children and Family Services in 2000, 2001, and 2002. Using the number of placements each child had experienced as the dependent variable in the study, Eggertsen examined three categories of independent variables: child characteristics, case-related characteristics, and system characteristics. The findings of the retrospective cross-sectional study were that the minors' health problems, mental health issues, delinquency, and sexual abuse were factors that contributed to multiple placements in foster care. Other researchers identified additional factors.

Age

Steen and Harlow (2012) used data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System to examine the consistency of factors for multiple placements across five states. The five states were Kansas, Maine, North Carolina, Utah, and Vermont. This study had significant numbers of children and adolescents in the foster care system of the five states. The largest sample was from the state of Kansas, with data from 7,816 children in foster care. The smallest sample was from Vermont, with data of 1,244 children. Steen and Harlow identified age, disability, and maltreatment type as consistent amongst all five states as factors for multiple placements. They reported age as being the most

prominent factor in placement instability in all five states. As children grew older, they were more likely experience placement instability.

James (2004) found that the factors of age, externalizing behaviors and the trauma of being emotional abused increased the child's placement move to correlated with behavior. Eggertsen's (2008) study also indicated that age of the foster child is associated with placement instability; as the child's age increases the number of placements will also increase.

Health Problems

Eggertsen (2008) found that children with minor health problems were 4.5 times more likely to have three or more placements. Although the presence of major health problems was not a final variable in this study, 60% of the children in the study had major health problems. The study did not to explain the difference between major and minor health problems.

Mental Health

The primary factor in foster care placement instability in Eggertsen (2008) study was mental health. Children who had a mental health issue had twice the probability of experiencing three or more placements. Eggertsen did not correlate specific mental health behaviors with placement stability.

Disability

Physical and mental disability was seen as influencing multiple placements in four of five states in Steen and Harlow's (2012) study. Data for this study were obtained from through the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Children who were clinically diagnosed as having disabilities were more likely to experience multiple placements in the four states that provided

data on disability. Only children that had been diagnosed by a professional were represented in this variable and that had been noted in the database. The fifth state, Maine, could not be included in the analysis for this variable because it had missing data.

Behaviors

James (2004) examined the reasons for placement changes in foster care and also analyzed the influences placement change had on the behaviors of the children in foster care. The study used data from 580 children placed in the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency System between May 1990 and October 1991. The longitudinal study related 20% of all the placement changes to the children's behavior. The children in this study experienced several placement changes. Seven percent of the children had experienced more than six placement changes, and one child had experienced 15 placement changes during the 18 months of the study (James, 2004).

One form of behavior specifically reported as a factor for multiple placements was delinquency. Eggertsen (2008) reported that children who were referred to the Utah Division of Children and Family Services for delinquent behaviors were twice as likely to experience three or more placements.

Maltreatment

Multiple placements have been found to be influenced by the type of maltreatment the child has experienced. Eggertsen (2008) found that there was a slight relationship between children who were sexual abuse and the likelihood of experiencing multiple. Steen and Harlow (2012) reported that physical abuse increased the probability of the foster child experiencing three or more

placements. Steen and Harlow (2012) noted that in their study, Vermont had the highest probability of placement instability due to physical abuse.

Factors in Multiple Placements Identified in Mixed-Methods Studies

The mixed-methods studies in the literature also examined behaviors as factors in multiple foster care placement. One study looked at factors in successful placement.

Behavior

In an attempt to analyze the relationship between behavior problems and placement change, Aarons et al. (2010) collected data from 500 children in 96 counties in 36 states. This was the first national prospective study of behavior and foster care placement. The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with child welfare workers at three points to assess behaviors at baseline (at the start of the child welfare investigation) and at 18 months and 36 months after the initial investigation. The results of the study indicated that minors who exhibited internalizing and externalizing behaviors at baseline and 18 months were most likely to experience placement breakdown.

Another investigation of the relationship between problem behaviors and multiple placements used data from foster care children in addition to interviews with their caretakers (Newton, Litrownik, & Landsverk, 2000). The researchers observed that children who experience multiple placements were at risk for harmful effects. The strongest predictor of placement change in the study was externalizing behaviors, suggesting that children who exhibit disruptive, aggressive, or dangerous behaviors are at risk for experiencing placement breakdown.

Foster parents and social workers reported that the child's behavior was the most influential factor in placement breakdown (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions, foster parents and social workers listed the factors they perceived to have the greatest influence on placement disruption. It was identified that behaviors associated violence, aggression, and risk-taking incidents were the most reported. Risk taking incidents included the use of drugs, alcohol, self-harming, and the foster child running away from the placement (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

Barber and Delfabbro (2003) reported that 75% of the children that remained in the foster care system from their study, began having behavior issues and had difficulties with their psychological and school adjustment. Within the first 4 months of their study, the researchers found that 40 children in the study experienced a mean of 5.7 placements because of the caregivers' inability to manage the children's behaviors. During the fourth-month period, there were 123 placement changes, 40 of those placement breakdowns occurred because of the foster parents' inability to manage the child's behaviors.

Ingley and Earley (2008) also identified behaviors as contributing factors to placement breakdown in the United Kingdom. In a review of 42 case files, the researchers concluded that placement breakdown occurred as a result of children having conflicts with other minors, siblings, and other children in the home. Challenging behavior, school issues, aggression, and allegations made against the foster parents were also themes obtained from case files. Conflicts between the foster child and another minor in the home were linked to aggression, jealousy, and competitiveness. The challenging behaviors reported in the study were lying, damaging property, and leaving the placement. Conflict with another child in the placement was also one of the major reasons for placement breakdown. Out of the

43 placement moves in the study, 31 were reported as disruptive. Out of those placement disruptions, 10 reported a new foster child being placed in the home.

Age and Gender

The connection between behavior problems, age, and multiple placements surfaced in a national child welfare sample. In the prospective study, Aarons et al. (2010) found that children who exhibited behavior problems at an older age were at risk of experiencing placement change. Also, externalizing behavior at 18 months was another factor that increased the possibility of experiencing placement change. The researchers also observed that females who experienced placement change within 18 to 36 months from the initial child welfare investigation were most likely to experience externalizing and internalizing behavior problems.

Successful Placement

Determining what contributes to successful foster care placement helps clarify the positive and negative impact of different variables on placement. In a mixed-methods study, Brown and Campbell (2007) used concept mapping in a quantitative approach to examining their qualitative interviews with foster parents. The foster parents in their study linked successful placement with security for the child, family connections, positive and strong relationships, agencies' involvement with the family, and an environment that fosters positive outcomes in the foster children's development.

Factors in Multiple Placements Identified in Meta-Analyses

A meta-analysis examined 26 studies of placement breakdown (Oosterman, Schuengel, Slot, Bullens, & Doreleijers, 2007). The analysis included research from several countries, using different study intervals, with children of a variety of

ages, using different research methods and indicators of placement failure. The factors that showed significant to moderate associations with placement breakdown were age, behavior problems, history of residential care, and previous placements. Other areas that were less significantly associated with placement breakdown were kinship and quality of foster caregiving. The most significant findings were from studies that used multivariate models.

Age

Some of the studies sought to determine if the age of the child was an indicator of placement breakdown. Research from 1966 and 1960 reported that older children experienced a greater number of placement breakdowns (Oosterman et al., 2007). To determine whether other research studies would support the findings of age being an indicator of placement breakdown, Oosterman et al. analyzed the findings of 15 studies. The findings demonstrated that there was a significant but small effect size between the child's age and placement breakdown.

Behavior

One of the older studies also identified the child's behavior as an indicator of placement breakdown (Parker, 1966, as cited in Oosterman et al., 2007). Again, Oosterman et al. analyzed additional studies to determine if other research confirmed that the child's behavior was a factor in placement breakdown. The researchers found that the presence of behavior problems was a strong indicator for placement in 12 other studies. The effect size of the studies varied, Oosterman et al. suggest that the variation could be by the age of the foster children in each study. The findings of the meta-analysis suggest that at least some breakdown of foster placement can be explained by the age of the foster children.

Placement History

Placement history was another factor identified in early studies as an indicator of placement breakdown. Seven of the studies Oosterman et al. (2007) analyzed, the effects of institutional care on placement breakdown. The results were small, but there was an indication that children that have been placed in residential care experienced more placement breakdowns. Another factor analyzed in placement history was the number of previous placements experienced by foster children. Using six samples, it was determined that children who experienced previous foster care placements likely to have more placement breakdowns. Another predictor analyzed was the first placement in foster care. The findings indicated that children experience placement breakdown in their first foster care placement.

A second meta-analysis examined 43 research studies to determine the extent to which foster children were included as a source of data in the investigation of multiple placements (Unrau, 2007). The study analyzed quantitative and qualitative research studies published between 1959 and 2005. An important contribution of this meta-analysis was the listing of data sources researchers used to investigate placement moves in foster care. The study reported that 23 studies used case records, 16 used case workers, 11 used foster parents, 9 used foster children, 1 used the birth parent, and 5 used data sources. The analysis identified that the majority of the studies use case record data, a source that that does not represent the viewpoints and perspectives of any individual experiencing the phenomenon. Also, the study identifies that there are very few studies that use data provided by foster children. Another important finding was the inconsistent use of terminology and operational definitions amongst studies focused on understanding placement moves.

Factors in Multiple Placements Identified in Longitudinal Studies

Striker, Knorth, and Knot-Dickscheit (2008) conducted a longitudinal study of 419 children in long-term foster care in the District of North Netherlands from September 1, 2000, to June 1, 2004. The researchers investigated the number of placements foster children experienced, examined the relationship between previous placements and factors that had been identified as predictors of replacements; age, continuity, and problem behaviors. As data sources, the researchers used the files of children in foster care; social workers were contacted when data were missing from the files. Children in the study had experienced at least one placement breakdown per year. The researchers found that for previous placement, foster children who are in kinship foster care have experienced the same number of placements when compared to children that children in foster family placements. Also, a correlation was found between the number of placements, child characteristics age and the continuity of care.

Findings from Prospective Studies

This literature review explored a number of prospective studies that looked at outcomes of foster care placement from the perspectives of foster youth, former foster youth, and foster parents.

Perceptions of Former Foster Youth

A qualitative study of 22 adults who lived in foster care during their childhood was conducted to obtain the perceptions of former foster youth on placement moves, particularly their perceptions of any lasting consequences placement moves had in their lives (Unrau et al., 2008). The four major themes emerged regarding how the former foster youth remembered multiple moves: experiences of profound loss, emotional shut downs, caring adults, and guarded

optimism. The former foster youth identified two long-term consequence of multiple placements: trust issues remaining and life lessons gained. Participants also described struggles in managing their emotions and the presence of mental health problems

In another prospective study of the long-term effects of placement instability, Stott (2011) reported that children who experienced multiple placements in foster care were at risk of substance use in adulthood. Of the 114 participants in the study, 76% had used a drug or been intoxicated at least once; 24% reported using in the 30 days before the study. Alcohol and marijuana were the most frequent substances used by the participants in the study.

Perceptions of Foster Parents

Khoo and Skoog (2014) conducted an interpretive phenomenology study with eight foster parents to obtain an understanding of the parents' experiences with placement breakdown. Some of the concerns the foster parents reported were short notice of placement, not enough information provided on the child's difficulties, and high demands of adolescents with risky behaviors. The researchers identified a cry for help from the foster parents as a pattern in the responses. The foster parents wanted to support and guidance from agencies as well as help with services for the foster children. The foster parents named some situations as difficult to manage, specifically incidents in which the foster child wanted to commit suicide and situations in which the foster parents' biological children were negatively affected.

Placement breakdown causes. Brown and Bednar (2006) interviewed 63 foster parents to ascertain causes of placement breakdown from the foster parents' perspectives. They found that foster parents would end a placement if they thought

the placement posed a danger to the family, if the child was not adapting, or if they were not able to manage the child's behavior. The foster parents also indicated placement breakdown could occur if their own health deteriorated or if they lacked external support.

Support needed. The literature showed a strong need among foster parents for support. Hudson and Levasseur (2002) asked foster parents what types of support they needed to maintain their caring role; the foster parents named respect, affirmation, and acknowledgment as important forms of support. In another qualitative study foster parents in Canada also identified respect as one of the supports they considered valuable, along with trust and communication (MacGregor, Rodger, & Cummings, 2006).

Successful and Unsuccessful Placements

Foster parents have identified several factors they believe facilitate successful placement. Some of the factors are linked to the type of services agencies provide the foster parent, and other factors have to do with the personality characteristics of the foster parents. In regards to agencies, foster parents suggested that successful foster placement requires a good relationship between the agency and the foster parents, provision of individualized services, and facilitation of connection to other foster families (Brown, 2007). Foster parents also indicated that foster parents need to have the right personality and skills to make foster care placement successful (Brown).

To determine what the right personality and skills were, Crum (2010) measured parenting characteristics of foster parents and related them to stable

placements. Characteristics that were found to be essential in stable placements supportive parenting and ability to set limits and enforce rules.

Rostill-Brookes et al. (2011) interviewed five foster youth as well as the foster parents and social workers of the foster youth to understand how all the groups experienced placement breakdown. The researchers reported that all the participants were affected by the breakdown. The participants' responses about placement breakdown revolved around mistrust, miscommunication, and the dismissal or suppression of emotions.

Intervention Studies

This review included research on two interventions. Collado and Levine (2007) used a combination of mental health treatment, family participation, and the collaboration of agencies involved with the foster child to develop an initiative to reduce the number of foster care placements. They found that collaboration among the mental health clinician, the foster care families, and foster care agencies generally had positive outcomes in reducing the number of placements.

The other intervention was a 16-week foster parent training program. Foster parents were provided with training on behavior management, support, and supervision (Price et al., 2008). The researchers identified placement instability as a risk factor for future placement breakdowns. They demonstrated that giving foster parents behavior management training effectively reduced foster children's negative behaviors. The intervention also improved the caregivers' ability to use coping skills to deal with the children's behaviors.

Theoretical Framework

The literature describes a number of theories that are useful in exploring the topic of foster care placement. Among them are three that are relevant to the current study: systems theory, standpoint theory, and attachment theory.

General Systems Theory

Ludwig von Bertalanffy is credited in the social work field for introducing systems theory into the theoretical framework world (Brandell, 2011). System theory argues that there are structure similarities amongst many disciplines (Bertalanffy, 1968). The entities within each discipline are system components that consequently correspond to the forces that are formed between them (Bertalanffy, 1968). In other words, General System Theory is the idea that a variety of individuals, agencies, and organizations work with each other at different levels, but will share certain common traits when interacting with each other. There are several systems in place for child welfare services. The systems that are in place within the child welfare services are specific in terms of the population they serve, the mission and the goals. They can be complex due to the variety of children and families they provide services to. Also, child welfare is a complex organization that varies in units and services. General System Theory serves as an organizing conceptual theory that elaborates on the complexity of systems and attempts to explain the phenomenon of placement breakdown based on the force of interaction between entities (Brandell, 2011).

Systems theory is a framework for understanding the types of interaction that occurs between systems (Brandell, 2011). Using systems theory, the researcher observes all the systems that interact with one another, noting the inputs and outputs of each and evaluating the outcomes of the interactions (Brandell, 2011). In the present study, the outcome is placement breakdown that results in

multiple placements for foster care children. The items evaluated in this study are the factors that contribute to negative interactions among systems, creating placement breakdowns.

The focus of this study is anomie. In social systems theory, anomie is a severe disruption between the individual and the individual's social environment (Brandell, 2011). This study aims to get a good understanding of the disruptions that occur between the foster child and the foster placement that leads to subsequent placement breakdown.

Theoretical Framework Used in Previous Studies

In the attempt to understand the phenomenon of placement breakdown, several theories have been used in studies as a foundation in an attempt to explain the occurrence.

Standpoint Theory

One theory used in the literature for foster care placement is standpoint theory. Unrau (2007) used standpoint theory in his review of 43 studies of placements moves in foster care. Standpoint theory describes how an individual perceives a phenomenon (Unrau, 2007). The theory argues that oppressed individuals have more possibilities for seeing the reality of a situation and are therefore the best subjects for research on phenomena in which they have been oppressed; they are the ones who have lived the experience under investigation (Unrau, 2007).

With standpoint theory as a framework, Unrau (2007) uncovered remarkable information. Of the 43 studies he analyzed only 9 used foster children as their source of data and 11 used foster parents; 23 relied on case files. Unrau (2007) pointed out that case records are unreliable in providing an understanding

of a phenomenon or an event, particularly understanding of people's perceptions of the event. He considered the failure to use the best data sources for research on the factors that contribute to placement breakdown a serious concern. Unrau (2007) believed that because foster children and foster care parents are the ones experiencing placement breakdown, they should be used for data collection on placement issues

Attachment Theory

Ingley and Earley (2008) used attachment theory as a framework for exploring the needs of children who have been exposed to neglect and physical and sexual abuse. The framework attempts to explain the impact of children's experiences of exposure to traumatic events on their difficulty forming relationships. Attachment theory maintains that positive family and peer relationships are crucial to children as those relationships play a part in the development of a secure identity (Brandell, 2011). Ingle and Earley (2008) asserted that behavioral issues in children are survival strategies that enable the children to have control of their relationships and avoid future rejection and harm.

Gaps in Research

From this review of the literature, some gaps appear evident in the research on foster care placement breakdown. One gap is in the reliability of these data sources to yield accurate findings. A number of studies in the literature identified the presence of behavior problems in children as one of the indicators for placement breakdown (Aarons et al., 2010; Eggertsen, 2008; Gabrielli, Jackson, & Brown, 2015; Ingley & Early, 2008; James, 2004; Oosterman et al., 2007; Ward, 2009). However, the primary data for these studies have come from child welfare agencies and case record data, not from the foster care children, foster care parents

or social workers who are closest to the issue. There is a need in the literature for studies using data collected from foster children, and foster parents seem obvious. Some of the researcher cited above suggested that future studies should examine the problem of placement breakdown from the foster parent's perspective (Eggersten, 2008; Ingley & Early, 2008; James, 2004; Oosterman et al., 2007). The research that has been conducted on the perceptions of foster parents on placement breakdown demonstrates that these perspectives are needed to get a complete understanding of the factors that cause placement breakdown (Brown & Bednar, 2006; Khoo & Skoog, 2014).

Summary

This literature review explored the origins and development of the factors that contribute to the multiple placements of foster children from a theoretical and an empirical perspective. The theoretical literature provided a foundation for the research, and the empirical literature provides the findings from the variety of research methods that have been utilized to identify the factors that contribute to multiple placements in foster care. This literature review also examines the gaps in research studies. The following chapter will discuss the steps in the research design and methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

All foster children are at risk for multiple placements in the foster care system. The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (2013) estimated that there are about 402,172 children in foster care nationwide. Out of those children, it is estimated that 56,577 children are in foster care in California (Webster et al., 2016). Between October 1, 2014, and March 1, 2015, 416 children have experienced more than five placements within the foster care system (Webster et al., 2016). The lack of research on the perception foster parents have on the indicators that contribute to multiple placements is still under-researched (Eggersten, 2008; Ingley & Early, 2008; James, 2004; Oosterman et al., 2007). This qualitative study aims to conduct research on the perspectives foster parents have on the indicator that contributes to multiple placements.

Purpose and Background

The basis of this research emerged from the study of Evelyn Khoo and Viktoria Skoog and their research on the foster parents' experiences of the events surrounding placement breakdown (Khoo & Skoog, 2014). Permission was obtained from Evelyn Khoo to use the study, *The road to placement breakdown; Foster parents' experiences of the events surrounding the unexpected ending of a child's placement in their care*, as the foundation for this study.

A phenomenology approach was used for this research study. A phenomenology consists of identifying a phenomenological experience, where data are analyzed and reduced to significant statements or quotes (Creswell, 2007). For this study, the data was collected from foster parent interviews. Data collected were analyzed through a content analysis to identify themes (Rubin & Babbie, 1993)

Target Population

The target population this study utilized consisted of foster parents who have previously experienced at least one placement breakdown through a 7-day-notice. The researcher inquired about their perception of the situation and the contributing factors that led to placement breakdown. Five foster parents participated this study. The participants all lived in several different counties in the Central Valley in California.

Methods

Participants for this study were gathered through the snowball sampling method. A snowball sample consists of identifying cases through people who know people that fit the criteria for the study (Creswell, 2007). Individuals who participate had previously experienced a placement breakdown. Spanish-speaking foster parents were also given the opportunity to participate in the study to make sure as many people as possible were able to participate. A flyer in Spanish and English was provided to several individuals in the Central Valley who had expressed knowing of a foster parent who had previously experienced a placement breakdown. Please see Appendix A for the English flyer and Appendix B for the Spanish flyer. For the purpose of this phenomenology study, 5 foster parents participated in interviews. It is recommended that the sample size should range from 1 to 10 individuals with one phenomenon in common (Creswell, 2007).

Potential Risks

There were minimal risks associated with this specific phenomenology study. Foster parents' responses were kept confidential. For the purpose of this study, only questions about the phenomenon were asked. Data gathered from the

interview were maintained in a safe, secure place. After the data had been collected, any information that was no longer needed was destroyed.

This study was reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Protection Committee of the Department of Social Work Education at California State University in Fresno.

Management of Risks

Interviews were conducted face to face. Participants were informed of the topic of the study and the requirements needed to participate. The participants that met the criteria for the study contacted the researcher. Time and place were determined by the participant in a comfortable and familiar environment. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. For confidentiality purposes, the participant's names were kept confidential. Audio recordings were deleted immediately after recordings were transcribed. Participants were given the opportunity to terminate the interview at any time. Participants were informed before the interviews of their ability to terminate the interviews. Every participant was also provided with counseling information. Please see Appendix C for counseling information.

Subject Compensation

Participants were informed that their participation in the study would be compensated. The participants were allowed to choose a \$10 gift card from Starbucks or Target at the end of the study.

Academic Qualification

The research investigator for this study is, Sylvia Mandujano, a graduate student in the Social Work Department at California State University of Fresno.

The research investigator has met the graduate requirements for the conduction of this research study. Ms. Mandujano conducted this study under the supervision of Dr. Irán Barrera, an associate professor in the graduate program. Foster parents who speak Spanish were eligible to participate in the study. Ms. Mandujano is proficient in speaking, writing and translating in Spanish. Dr. Barrera is also bilingual and has previously conducted studies amongst the Hispanic population.

The Consent Form

Prior to each interview, the participant was given a consent form. The consent form provided information regarding the study and informed the participant of their rights. Each participant was informed of the process of the study before beginning the interview. A signed consent form was obtained from each participant in the language the interview was conducted. The consent form was available in English and Spanish. Please see Appendix D for a consent form. For the Spanish consent, please see Appendix E.

Instruments

The research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. Demographic questions were composed of six questions. The interview questions were composed of 5 questions. Out of the five interview questions; two questions were the focus of this study. The interviews ranged from 28 to 37 minutes in length. In this type of interview, open-ended questions were allowed and included. Please see Appendix F for instrument guideline. Please see Appendix G for the Spanish instrument guideline.

Certification of Training

Prior to beginning the research study, the Human Subject Assurance Training was obtained. Please see Appendix H for the certificate.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a phenomenology study is based on how the notion is grounded and supported (Creswell, 2007). A phenomenology study must demonstrate that the data collection has a strong connection with the phenomenon being researched. Trustworthiness of this study is demonstrated by the literature review and the procedures that were taken to ensure reliability and accuracy.

Summary

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach. Foster parents from the Central Valley, who previously experienced one placement breakdown were gathered as participants, through the snowball method. Using the instrument guidelines of a semi-structured interview, data was collected and examined through a content analysis method. The next chapter provides the data analysis from the five interview obtained for this study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions foster care parents have as to the factors that contribute to placement breakdown. To study this phenomenon, an interview guide was developed consisting of five semi-structured open-ended interview questions. In-person interviews were conducted with the five participants. The research questions examined the perceptions foster parents have about the circumstances leading up to placement break down and the factors they believed contributed to the placement breakdown.

Demographics

The five participants for this phenomenological study were gathered from three counties in the Central Valley region of California. Two participants were from Fresno County, two from Tulare County, and one from Kings County. The participants for this study were foster parents who experience at least one placement breakdown from a 7-day notice initiated by the foster parents. The researcher identified the interviewees as numbered participants (1-5). Table 1 consists of the participants' information; language, age, gender, (self-reported) ethnicity, the number of years being a foster parent, number of children currently placed in the home, and the number of children previously placed in the home.

Major Themes

Data gathered through the interviews were analyzed using content analysis. The participants' responses were closely analyzed and then separated into themes. The nine major themes identified from the five interviews were the following: 1) Wanting to adopt 2) Knowing a family member who was a foster parent 3)

Behaviors 4) Safety of others 5) Distress 6) Hopelessness 7) Lack of Resources 8) Defeated and 9) Difficult.

Table 1

Demographics

Participant	Language	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Number of years being a foster parent:	Number of foster children currently placed in the home:	Number of foster children previously placed in the home:	Number of 7 day notices experienced:
1	English	35	Female	Mexican	7	5	32+	1
2	Spanish	55	Female	Mexican	7	5	32+	1
3	English	47	Female	Caucasian	18 months	0	2	1
4	English	30	Female	Caucasian	1	0	2	1
5	English	32	Female	Caucasian	6	2	60+	2

Question 1: What led you to become a foster parent?

The first interview question the participants were asked was, “What led you to become a foster parent?” Two themes were identified as to the reason the interviewees had become foster parents. One theme identified amongst the interviewees as to the reason for becoming a foster parent was for adoption purposes. The second theme identified was to interviewees knowing of a family member who was a foster parent.

Wanting to Adopt

The theme, wanting to adopt, was identified in two of the participants. Wanting to adopt was identified with the following keywords: wanted to adopt, and intention of wanting to adopt. Participant 2 reported she was familiar with the adoption process as participant 2, and her husband had siblings that were adopted.

Participant 3, We did it because we wanted to adopt, and so that was the avenue that we chose, to adopt, was to go through foster care and the reason

for that was that, I worked in the field for so long and both of our families have a sibling that was adopted, so it was kind of something that was on our radar.

Participant 4 had no children of her own at the time of placement with the foster child whom she experienced placement breakdown with.

Participant 4 stated My husband wanted to be a foster parent, we went into it with the intention of wanting to adopt. We didn't necessarily think it was our first placement, and when we were working with our agency, they were pretty clear with us, that there was probably gonna be some potential for a few foster placements before we were actually placed with a long term placement. We hoped to start our family.

Knowing a Family Member Who Was a Foster Parent

The theme, knowing a family member who was a foster parent, was identified with the following keywords: my daughter was the one that told me, and parents have done it previously. It appears that, for some, the relationships that the participants had with other foster parents led them to become one themselves. Participant 2 stated, "It was my daughter who told me." Participant 5 reported, "Um, my parents have done it previously, they adopted 6 children."

Question 2: Can you help me understand what led to the/each placement breakdown?

The second question the participants were asked was, "Can you help me understand what led to the/each placement breakdown?" The participants were consistent in recalling incidents that occurred with the foster children they had placed with them when they were asked to discuss what led to the placement breakdown. The two themes identified with the incidents described by the

participants were behaviors and safety. Foster parents identified several concerning behaviors they had that the child exhibited. The behaviors consisted of violence, use of drugs, fighting, jealousy and self-harming.

Behaviors

The theme, behaviors, was consistent in all five participants. This theme was identified with the following keywords: violent, fighting, fist fights, violence, angry, aggressive, fighter, jealousy, behaviors, regulate, competitiveness, tantrums, anger, rage, physical, throw himself, screamed, destructive, screaming, self-harming.

Violence. Four out of the five participants described their foster children as exhibiting violent behaviors. Some participants were direct in the way they described the situation. Participant 1 describes her first placement breakdown as, “The first one was (Child’s name), that one we turned him in because he started to be violent.” Sometimes, the level of violence was significant and dangerous. The participant describes his level of violence by stating, “He started to be violent at school; he put a kid in the hospital” (Participant 1). The 14-year-old-child was described as being violent towards his siblings for the participant recalled that “He had a brother that he shared a room, to which he was very close, but he was constantly fighting like fist fighting” (Participant 1). For some, the violence was not as extreme, but still problematic. Participant 2 recalled her 12-year-old foster child, whom she experienced placement breakdown as, “a fighter.” Participant 2, recalled the child fighting with boys and girls. Participant four and five reported that the level of violence the minor exhibited was the factor that led to the placement breakdown.

Self-harming. The violent behavior of the foster children was not only directed at others. Participant 5 reported that she experienced a placement breakdown with a 3-year-old who she described as having several behavioral issues. The participant described the 3-year-old by stating, “She threw lots of fits, where she was actually violent, she was self-harming herself like she would pull her hair, she would hit her head on the wall, she would wet on herself and just play in it “(Participant 5).

Use of drugs. Participant two described how the 12-year-old that was placed with her was using drugs. Participant 2 recalled, “He was into drugs, they caught him with drugs at school.” This 12-year-old is the same minor the participant described as fighting with boys and girls (Participant 2).

Jealousy. Not all the foster children who experienced placement breakdown exhibited physical violence. Participant 3 described the behaviors of her 12-year-old foster child as non-violent behaviors. Nevertheless, they caused significant distress. The foster mother describes the foster child’s behaviors with jealousy (Participant 3). Participant 3 recalled that one of the factors that lead to the placement breakdown was the “issues between him and the other kids, a lot of jealousy.” The behaviors this foster child was exhibiting were difficult to understand as the participant stated, “I didn’t understand his behaviors, I took a lot of things personally.” Participant 3 defines the minor’s behaviors as, “he couldn’t regulate himself”. Competitiveness was also another behavior that Participant 3 described as the minor’s behavior, “But mostly it was his competitiveness, and nothing was fair in his mind, nothing was fair, he was jealous”.

Screaming. Some of the children were too young to exhibit behaviors such as violence and jealousy. Participant 5 experienced placement breakdown with two foster care minors, one of which was very young and non-verbal. The participant recalled the placement breakdown with the 3-month-old as,

And then we did give notice on the drug baby we had. It was just so destructive because my children were still little and she screamed nonstop like 24/7 and I just couldn't with my kids' appointments and then having to take on with one that screamed all the time, I couldn't take that any longer.

Safety of Others

The second most consistent factor reported by the participants as being influential to the placement breakdown was the safety concerns the participants had for people whom they were close to, and they felt the child might harm either physically or emotionally. All the participants expressed their concern for the physical or emotional safety of other individuals. This theme was identified with the following keywords: bad influence, safety, treat everyone bad, affecting the other children, issues, chaotic, problems, incident, threw it at my head, and hit my son.

Participant 1 expressed concern for her godson as she stated, "Then I have my godson, that I had, he (foster child) was just being a really bad influence, I guess you can say." While there was no overt violence, the sheer influence of the foster child was problematic. Participant 2 shared concern for other children in the home, as he stated, "He would treat everyone bad. Their behavior was affecting the other kids".

Participant 3 shared concern for the other children in the home. This participant shared that there were issues with the foster child and the other

children in the home, but it was her biological son whom she was most concerned for (Participant 3). Participant 3 elaborated on this emotional issue when she shared she observed her son withdraw. She stated,

I think the part that hurt the most was sort of watching him, like I felt we lost him in a way at that time because he just sort of blended into the background and kind of pulled away from us because it was so difficult and chaotic.

Participant 4 also shared concern for herself, the babysitter and the child's teacher. The participant recalled, "But he definitely had problems with the babysitter, he definitely had big problems with me off and on, with his female teacher; it was hit and miss." A particular incident led to the 7-day notice by this participant as she stated, "I had called and given notice after a particular concerning incident" (Participant 4). The incident is further described by her as,

So we were on our way home from baseball, just a practice, and he got upset; I don't remember what he got upset about, but he was in the car and took off his cleat and threw it at my head while driving and then he tried to unbuckle himself and open the door, and he was like I'm leaving (Participant 4).

Participant 5 had a similar safety concern that led to the 7-day notice. The participant's concern was for her son, "She hit my son with the shovel, and she cut his head open, and so we had to get that taken care of, so we couldn't keep her any longer" (Participant 5).

Question 3: Can you describe the factors that you believe contributed to the/each placement breakdown?

There were three themes identified when participants were asked, “Can you describe the factors that you believe contributed to the/each placement breakdown?” The themes were distress, hopelessness, and lack of resources.

Distress

Distress was predominant amongst all respondents. This theme was identified with the following keywords: asking help, on alert, very stressful, expectations, hard on the kids, hard, stress, unknown, and painful.

Participant 1 reported to, asking for help after the foster care child demonstrated violent behaviors. The participant’s distress is identified as she stated, “We were asking for help constantly” (Participant 1). This distress is also identified as she stated that she was, “always on alert” (Participant 1). Participant 2, reports that one of the factors leading to the placement breakdown was, “More than anything it was very stressful.” Participants 1 and 2 experienced the placement breakdown with foster children who demonstrated physical and behavioral problems.

Participant 3 reported to needing help as she stated, “I just think our expectations were super unrealistic and, I was just, didn’t have any, just wasn’t getting the help I needed.” This participant also observed that the situation was affecting her other children in the home, as she stated, “I think it just got to the point where umm, it was just really hard on the kids.” The participant explained the difficulties of the situation with the foster child in the home as,

It’s really hard, and unless you were living in our house sort of, then you couldn’t really understand what was happening, umm because when he was out in public or out at school, it looked a lot different (Participant 4).

Stress in the home was also identified by Participant 3 as she described the issues with the foster child and the other children in the home. Participant 4 describes the difficult situation as,

We had gone into this with the expectation that these two kids can be our boys, and so letting go of that dream; that was the emotional part of it and just the unknown. If we say no, what does that mean for this kid?

Participant 4 had two foster care children in her home, two brothers. The participant experienced the placement breakdown with the oldest sibling. The participant further explains the difficulties of making the decision of giving her 7-day notices as, “That was painful, though, it was painful to make a really unknown decision and particularly we were just not making a decision about one but about two, both these kids, forever.”

Hopelessness

All the participants became foster parents in the interest of helping the child. However, as the behaviors and actions of their foster children worsened, they began to lose hope that they would be able to help the children. The theme of hopelessness emerged from the respondents’ desperate need of assistance as they described the challenges they were facing when attempting to help the minor. When the assistance was not given or was inadequate, a feeling of hopelessness became prevalent. This theme was identified with the following keywords: we couldn’t help, we were done, get help, we tried and tried, didn’t get that, I didn’t understand, gave up faith, hope, couldn’t be successful, and afraid.

Participant 1 expressed the inability to help with the violent behaviors the minor in her home was exhibiting as she expressed, “We felt we couldn’t help him”. The inability to help the child with his behaviors was an important factor

that led to the placement breakdown for the participant stated, “The first time we were done because we had tried to get help, were just done, it’s so sad because we felt we can’t do anything.” The inability to understand the behaviors was also as contributing factor to not being able to help the minor with the behaviors. Multiple attempts were made by Participant 2 in assisting with the behaviors as she stated, “We tried to make them change, we tried and tried.” Participant 3 stated, “It took me a really long time to realize that most of his issues were trauma related, and I just didn’t get that, unfortunately. I didn’t understand that at the time”. Eventually, hopeless took over, and placement breakdown occurred.

Participant 3 also did not understand the behavior the minor was exhibiting as she stated, “I just wasn’t getting the help I needed, I didn’t understand his behaviors, I took a lot of things personally.” The reassurance that the situation with the minor was going to get better was lost as it was expressed,

I just think, we finally got to the point where we were ten months in, and we felt like nothing. We haven’t made any progress, and I think we just gave up faith that we would make any progress. We didn’t have any hope” (Participant 3).

Feeling hopeless led to foster parents feeling that there was nothing else that could have been done as it was expressed,

If it was right now in my life, I would like to think I could handle it a little differently and may there would have been more hope, but for that time, I didn’t have any there was nothing I could do (Participant 3).

Participants shared the they made multiple attempts on their own to help the minor in their home and even attempted to get professional help, but at the end, they still felt they were not making any progress, “Basically at the end of the day I couldn’t be successful with them” (Participant 4). Without the inability to

understand and help the minor with the behaviors, Participant 4 felt afraid for her other children at home as she stated, “I was just afraid, that it would continue, and I couldn’t allow that.” Clearly this hopeless and despair was a significant factor in all those placement breakdowns.

Lack of Resources

Respondents continuously expressed that the need for support and that support was often inadequate or not available at all. It was evident that all the participants wanted more help in understanding and addressing the behaviors the minors were exhibiting. This theme was identified with the following keywords: getting any help, social worker, the program, agency, therapy, explaining, needed support, professional, mental health counseling, mental health, don’t qualify, and referral.

Participant 1 shared that the violent behavior that the foster child was exhibiting was reported to the proper agencies, and help was also asked for. While she wanted to help the child, she couldn’t with her given resources as she stated, “We were asking for help constantly from the social workers, the program we were in, and they couldn’t give us what we needed.” Participant 3 had a similar response as she explained that she would have wanted someone to explain to her the behaviors the minor was exhibiting. She wanted to help the child, but her lack of understanding presented a barrier as she recalled, “I understand those behaviors now, but I didn’t understand them at the time, and I didn’t have anybody that was explaining them to me” (Participant 3). Participant 2 reports to taking the seven children to the agency and being convinced to let them stay in the home as she stated, “We went to turn them into the agency, they were seven brothers, they

were all looking. They started to talk to us and told us to have patience, so he let them stay”.

It was expressed that peer support from another foster parent who had experienced similar situation would have been helpful. Participant 3 expressed that she would have liked guidance from someone who had gone through the process successfully, and who could of provided her with proven techniques as she expressed, “I needed support, I needed someone that has been there and done that and has come out on the other side and can say, here is what we did” (Participant 3). While this participant did get support from a previous foster parent, the reinforcement, and problem-solving techniques were not provided as she expressed,

So they hooked me with someone who happens to be another professional in the field, and she was completely unhelpful, she basically told me that her two kids still don’t like each other that much, that they have found a way to manage it “(Participant 3).

Out of the five participants, only two foster parents report receiving any support services. One participant expressed there was a need for resources for improving the relationships between the foster child and the family as the participant longed for an integrated approach. It was expressed as,

He was getting therapy but the therapy was sort of talking about his abuse history, which is great but there was never joint therapy with us to work on the parenting relationship, the family relationship (Participant 3).

One service that was identified as being desperately needed was mental health services. Participant 4 expressed that she had requested for mental health counseling and was questioned by one social worker as she reports, “One of the things I asked when he came to us was for mental health counseling, and our

agency worker sat and told me, well do you think he needs that?”. Participant 4 expressed that she has requested mental health counseling from two different social workers and was not able to get a referral. Participant 5 denied being referred to services for the 3-year-old foster care child who was self-harming while in her care.

Question 4: How did you perceive the placement breakdown?

There were three themes identified when participants were asked, “How did you perceive the placement breakdown?” The themes were; defeated and difficult.

Defeated

The theme defeated was identified with the following key terms; we were done, we tried and tried, and second guessed myself. Participant 1 reported to, “The first time, we were done because we had tried to get help, we were just done.” The second participant reports to attempting to change the minors as she stated without any positive outcomes as she stated, “We tried to make them change, we tried and tried.” Participant 5 reports to having to second guess herself when giving her 7-day notice because while she knew that she was not able to meet the need of the minor in her care she did not want the minor to experience multiple transfers. Participant 5 recalled,

If they were going to go to their family, I wanted to keep them until they go to their family, so they can work on their issues they have. I don't want them to transfer from home to home because that's what messes them up.

Difficult

The theme difficult was identified with the following key terms; struggle, traumatic, painful, and sad. Participant 4 reports that it has been eight years ago

since the placement breakdown, and she is still struggling with the incident of the placement breakdown. Participant 4 further explained that the experience was traumatic for her family as she stated, “It was really traumatic, there was a lot of healing, especially for my son.” Participant 4 reports her perception of the placement breakdown as painful. The participant explains her perception from not knowing the outcomes the 7-day notice would have on the minor. The participant recalled,

It was painful, we had gone into this with the expectation that these two kids can be our boys, and so letting go of that dream was difficult. That was the emotional part of it, and just the unknown, if we say no, what does that mean for this kid.

Participant 5 identified the placement breakdown with the emotion of it being “sad.” Participant 5 recalled, “I think it’s really sad with the older ones because you don’t know what they are going to have to deal with when they grow up because that’s already a trait. They’re already showing signs of being disturbed.”

Question 5: Was the/each placement change planned
with the social worker?

The final question participants were asked, “Was the/each placement change planned with the social worker?” Four of the five participants planned the placement change with the social worker. Participant 2 experienced the placement breakdown where the minor was moved from day to the next. Participant 1 reports that after given her 7-day notice the minor was removed from her home in less than one week. Participant 3 reports that the placement change occurred from one day to another, in which the minor was not aware he was being moved to another foster home.

Summary

The findings of this study demonstrate that there are various factors that lead to the 7-day notice placement breakdown. One factor that is consistent with this study and previous research studies on the factors that result in placement breakdown is the behaviors of foster children within the placement. This study further demonstrated the variety of barriers foster parents face that consequently leads placement breakdown. In the next chapter, further discussion of the findings, implications for social work practice, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the findings of this study and examines the outcomes relevant to previous studies. This chapter also deliberates the implications of this study to social work practice. Finally, the limitations of the study will be discussed, and future research recommendations will be presented.

Summary of Findings

This study was conducted to obtain the perceptions of foster parents have on the factors that led to placement breakdown in their home. The major findings of the study indicate that the phenomenon of placement breakdown is best understood from the perception of the individuals who lived through the experience.

The first aim of this study was to understand the factors that led to the placement breakdown. The themes that were identified from the participants' responses were behaviors and the safety of others. The study found that the participants were consistent with reporting behavioral incidents with the foster care child with whom placement breakdown was experienced with. Behaviors identified in the responses of the foster parents were violence, the use of drugs, jealousy, screaming and self-harming. Participants 1 and 5 reported that the violent behaviors of two foster care children resulted in the injury of minors that required medical attention. In this study, the use of drugs was reported by Participant 2. It was the only case that the use of drugs. Participant 3 was the only foster parent that identified a non-violent behavior. The participant reported that the minor's jealousy and competitiveness were affecting another child in her home. The youngest foster child in this study was a 3-month-old who was reported

to be constantly screaming. The most alarming behavior reported was the behaviors of the 3-year-old foster child, the child who was self-harming.

The behaviors of the foster care children consequently concerned the foster parents for the safety of others. Safety of others emerged as a theme; participants expressed their concern for the physical and the emotional well-being of others. All participants had other children in their homes during the time each placement breakdown occurred.

An interesting finding in this study was that out of the five participants, three of them disclosed that the child whom they experienced the placement breakdown with was diagnosed with a mental health disorder. The 12-year-old minor placed with Participant 3 was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. The 6-year-old, placed with the Participant 4, was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactive disorder and reactive attachment disorder. The 3-month-old minor placed with the Participant 5 was diagnosed as a drug-exposed infant. Participants did not state that their diagnosis was a factor that led to the placement breakdown; this finding emerged when participants were asked if the minor they experienced placement breakdown had been evaluated or diagnosed.

The second research aim was to identify factors that contributed to the placement breakdown from the perception of the foster parents. This study identified the themes distress, hopelessness and lack of resources as to being identified by the foster parents as contributing influences to the placement breakdown.

Distress emerged from participants sharing circumstances that provoked emotional responses. Participant 1 reported to constantly needing to be on alert and requesting help. The high level of stress was the emotional response that

Participant 2 described as being a factor to the placement breakdown. For Participant 3, it was the lack of assistance and the difficulties of understanding the situation at home that were identified as factors in her situation that led to the placement breakdown. As to Participant 4, the expectation of adopting was a response provided as to the factors that led to the placement breakdown. Participant 4 experienced placement breakdown with one of the siblings placed in her care. However, the other sibling was adopted by the Participant and her husband.

The theme hopelessness emerged from the participants reporting their inability to help the minors with their problematic behaviors. Foster parents found themselves in need of assistance in managing and understanding the behaviors of the foster care children. Also, foster parents reported that they were not provided with reassurance that their situation with the foster care child would improve.

Lack of resources emerged from the foster parents identifying that they were in need of services, support and guidance. The need for services was identified as the foster parents reported that they needed help in managing the behaviors of the foster children. One foster parent reported that she was not able to obtain a referral for mental health services from two different social workers for the foster minor in her care. Two foster parents expressed that they wanted to support and guidance in understanding and managing the behaviors that the foster children were exhibiting.

Relevancy to Literature

The literature supports the findings of this study, supporting literature adds credibility to the findings of this study. The behaviors of the foster children have been identified to be the most influential factor for placement breakdown in this

study. Previous studies (Aarons et al., 2010; Eggertsen, 2008; James, 2004; Parker, 1966) have also identified the behaviors of the foster child as a factor that contributes to placement breakdown. This study not only identifies behavior as a factor that influences placement breakdown, but this study provided specific behaviors incidents that foster parents shared to have been their perception of the behavior problems.

The safety of others also has also been an identified theme amongst foster parents as to being an influential factor to placement breakdown. In this study, foster parents were consistent in expressing concern for their safety and the safety of other in the home. Brown and Bednar (2006) found that foster parents indicated that placement would be terminated if it was creating a danger to their family. In this study foster parents did not directly indicate that the foster children were dangerous, foster parents were indicating that the safety of others in the home was a concern that led to the placement breakdown.

Foster parents identified the lack of resources as a contributing factor for the placement breakdown. Distress and hopelessness were two other themes that emerged from the responses of the foster parents as to the contributing factors for the placement breakdown. Brown and Bednar (2006) identified that the lack of external support was a motive for foster parents to end placement. Individualized services and connection to other foster families have been factors identified by foster parents as components needed for a successful placement (Brown, 2007). It has also been found that when parents feel supported their role as a foster parent is reinforced (Crum, 2009).

Implications for Social Work Practice

It is evident that the phenomenon of placement breakdown in foster home intrigues professionals in the academic field. The phenomenon is explored through a variety of research methods. While the findings in some studies are comparable, the findings lack three essential components; the perspectives of foster children, foster parents, and social workers. To get a better understanding of the challenges, barriers and the system dynamics surrounding the placement breakdown, the perception of those who experienced the phenomenon must be included. An identified liaison between the foster parents, foster children, child welfare agency and community agencies, is the social worker. Social Workers are field experts that can contribute to the research of placement breakdown in foster homes.

Limitation of the Study

The primary limitation of this study is the small sample size of participants. The findings of the study cannot be generalized to the experience of placement breakdown with all foster parents. The second limitation of this study is that interviews were only conducted with one foster parent in the family. The third limitation of the study was that perception of placement breakdown was only obtained from the perceptives of the foster parents.

Recommendations

- 1.) Incorporate the perception of foster parents, former foster children, and social workers in studies that attempt to identify the factors that lead to placement breakdown.
- 2.) Future studies should identify the factors that lead to missing case file data.

- 3.) Also, future studies should identify how foster parents perceive the behaviors of the foster children when a mental illness diagnosis has been diagnosed. Future studies should determine if foster parents are aware of the behaviors that emerge from a mental illness.

Future Research

This study only provides the perception of foster parents as to the factors that lead to placement breakdown in foster care. Future research must continue to incorporate the perception of foster parents and also include the perception of former foster children.

It would be beneficial to conduct more studies on the perspectives of foster parents and foster children that have lived through the experience of placement breakdown. Previous research studies have used case record studies that have failed to obtain the perspective of individuals that have experienced the phenomenon and who consequently are experiencing the long-term effects. Studies using case record data only provide general findings of the documented placement breakdown and only when documentation is found.

Past studies have encountered several problems with missing data. Future research studies should also focus on analyzing the factors that contribute to the significant amount of missing data of case information from children experiencing placement breakdown. Identifying the factors that lead to the missing data in case reports of placement breakdown can be significantly important, as placement breakdown is a significant phenomenon that should be documented in detail about the reasons for the placement breakdown.

Another beneficial study would be the perception foster parents have on the behaviors exhibited by the foster children. This would be beneficial because in this

study it was identified that several children had been diagnosed with a mental illness, yet the foster parents did not mention their diagnosis being the reason for their behaviors. It would be beneficial to identify if parents are perceiving the behaviors of the children as part of their diagnosis or are they correlating the behaviors with their parenting skills. If the correlation is being made with the parenting skills, it is consequently misleading the foster parents into believing that they are not capable of managing the child's behaviors

Summary

This chapter has reviewed and discussed the finding of this study. The finding of this study is supported by previous research studies conducted on the factors that lead to placement breakdown. In the effort to determine the factors that contribute to placement breakdown, studies must include the perceptions of foster parents as they are the caregivers experiencing the phenomenon.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER IN ENGLISH



FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT

The voice of Foster Parents matter.

Please invite foster parents to participate in a study conducted by Sylvia Mandujano, a graduate student in the social work department at the California State University of Fresno. The study being conducted would like to learn how foster care parents experience placement breakdown in their home.

Participants will be compensated for their time with a \$10 gift card to either Starbucks or Target (participant's choice).

Research

-

**Foster
Parents**

-

**Foster
Children**

-

**Personal
Experience**

-

**Perception of
Foster
Parents**

**SYLVIA
MANDUJANO, MSW
STUDENT**
silma1020@mail.fresno
state.edu
(559)XXX-XXXX

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER IN SPANISH



CUIDADO DE CRIANZA DE HOGAR

La voz de los padres de crianza es importante.

Por favor, de invitar a los padres de crianza temporal para participar en un estudio realizado por Sylvia Mandujano, una estudiante graduada en el departamento de trabajo social en la Universidad del Estado de California en Fresno. El estudio gustaría aprender de la experiencia de los padres de crianza cuando un hijo de crianza tuvo que ser movido a otro hogar. Los participantes serán compensados por su tiempo con una tarjeta de \$10 de regalo para cualquier Starbucks o Target (elección del participante).

Estudio

-

**Padres de
Crianza**

-

**Hijos de
Crianza**

-

**Experiencia
Personal**

-

**Percepción
de los Padres
de Crianza**

**SYLVIA
MANDUJANO, MSW
ESTUDIANTE**

silma1020@mail.fresno
state.edu

(559) XXX-XXXX

APPENDIX C: COUNSELING RESOURCES

Counseling Resources/ Recursos de Consejería

California Psychological Institute

1470 W Herndon Ave # 300, Fresno, CA 93711

(559) 256-20000

Fresno Family Counseling Center

3720 N. First Street, Fresno, CA 93726

(559) 229-3085

Se habla español.

The King's Counseling Services

1043 North Demaree Street, Visalia, CA 93291

(559)713-6001

Visalia Adult Mental Health Clinic

3300 S. Fairway St., Visalia, CA 93277

(559)623-0900

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM IN ENGLISH

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Sylvia Mandujano, a graduate student in the social work department at the California State University of Fresno. We hope to learn how foster care parents experience placement breakdown in their home. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your familiarity of placement breakdown as a foster parent.

If you decide to participate, Ms. Mandujano will ask demographic questions (ethnicity, age, and gender) and will conduct semi-structured interview questions. A semi-structured interview consists of two broad general questions about the experience of placement breakdown. Open ended questions will also be asked during the interview. It is anticipated that the interview will be between 45 min up to 1hr. There are no risks identified in the participation of this research. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law, if you give us your permission by signing this document.

A ten-dollar gift card to Target or Starbucks will be given to each participant at the end of the interview.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with California State University of Fresno. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. The Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects at California State University, Fresno has reviewed and approved the present research.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Irán Barrera, MSW, Ph.D. at (559)278-03-98 or by email at irbarrera@csufresno.edu. Questions regarding the rights of research subjects may be directed to Constance Jones, Chair, CSUF Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects, (559) 278-4468.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

I understand that the interview will be audiotaped then transcribed.

YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

Participant's signature _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM IN SPANISH

Consentimiento Informado

Está invitado a participar en un estudio realizado por Sylvia Mandujano, una estudiante del posgrado del Departamento de Trabajo Social de la Universidad del Estado de California en Fresno. Esperamos aprender cómo los padres percibieron descomposición de colocación en su casa. Fueron seleccionados como un posible participante en este estudio debido a su familiaridad de descomposición de colocación en su hogar. . Si usted decide participar, la Sra. Mandujano hará preguntas demográficas (etnicidad, edad y género) y realizará preguntas de la entrevista semiestructurada. Una entrevista semiestructurada consta de dos preguntas generales acerca de la experiencia de la ruptura de colocación en su hogar. También se les preguntarán preguntas abiertas durante la entrevista. Se prevé que la entrevista será de entre 45 min hasta 1 hora. No hay riesgos identificados en la participación.

Cualquier información que se obtiene en conexión con este estudio y que pueda ser identificado con usted permanecerá confidencial y será revelado solamente con su permiso o de lo requerido por la ley, si usted nos da su permiso al firmar este documento. Una tarjeta de regalo de diez dólares a Target o a Starbucks se le dará a cada participante al final de la entrevista.

Su decisión de participar o no, no va a afectar a sus relaciones futuras con la Universidad Estatal de California en Fresno. Si usted decide participar, usted es libre de retirar su consentimiento y discontinuar su participación en cualquier momento sin penalización. El Comité para la Protección de Sujetos Humanos de la Universidad Estatal de California en Fresno ha revisado y aprobado la el estudio.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta acerca de este estudio, por favor póngase en contacto con Irán Barrera, MSW, Ph.D. al (559) 278-03-98 o por correo electrónico a irbarrera@csufresno.edu . Las preguntas relacionadas con los derechos de los sujetos de la investigación se pueden dirigir a Constanza Jones, Presidente del Comité CSUF sobre la Protección de Sujetos

Se le dará una copia de esta forma.

Entiendo que la entrevista será grabada y transcrita.

Usted está haciendo una decisión de participar.

SU FIRMA INDICA QUE USTED HA DECIDIDO PARTICIPAR, DESPUES DE HABER LEIDO LA INFORMACION PROPORCIONADA ANTERIORMENTE.

Firma del Participante: _____

Fecha: _____

La firma del Investigador: _____

Fecha: _____

APPENDIX F: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT IN
ENGLISH

Qualitative Interview Instrument

Demographics:

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Number of years being a foster parent:

Number of foster children currently placed in the home:

Number of foster children previously placed in the home:

Interview Questions:

1. What led you to become a foster parent?
2. Can you help me understand the situation that led to the/each placement breakdown?
3. Can you describe the factors that you believed contributed to the/each placement breakdown?
4. How did you perceive the placement breakdown?
5. Was the/each placement change planned with the social worker?

APPENDIX G: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT IN
SPANISH

Instrumento para la Entrevista Cualitativa

Demografía:

Años:

Género:

Raza:

Número de años de ser un padre de crianza:

Número de hijos de crianza actualmente colocados en su hogar :

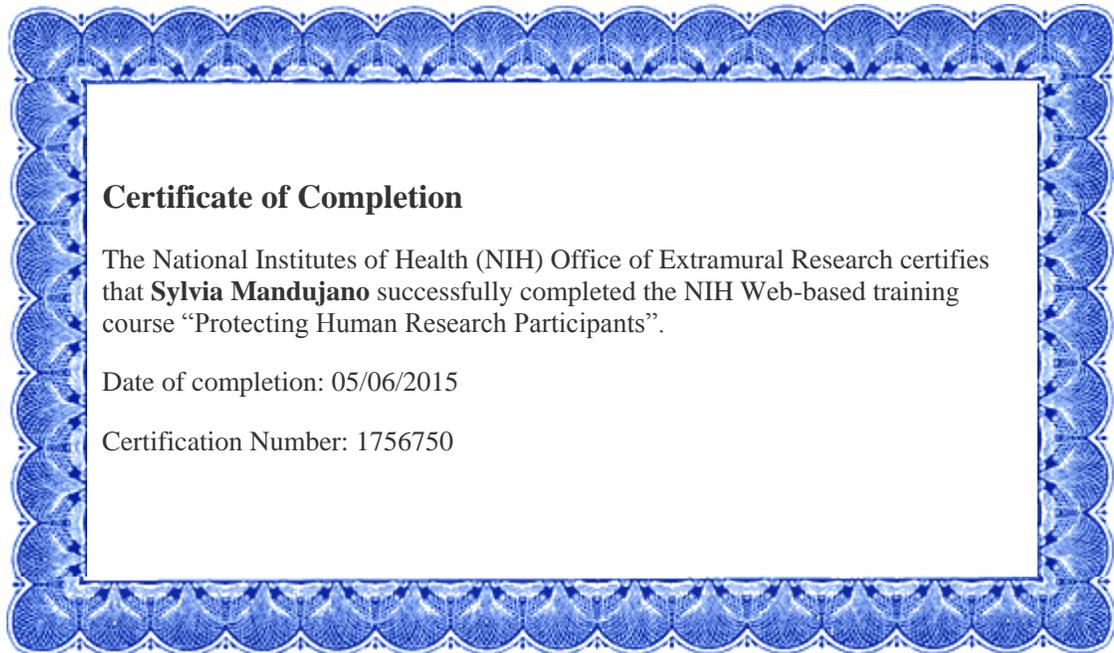
Número de hijos de crianza colocados previamente en su hogar :

Preguntas de entrevista:

1. ¿Qué lo llevó a ser un padre de crianza?
2. ¿Puedes ayudarme a entender la situación que llevó a la /cada ruptura de colocación?
3. ¿Puede describir los factores que usted cre que contribuyeron a la /cada ruptura de colocación?
4. ¿Cómo percibió usted la ruptura de colocación?
5. ¿Fue el/cada cambio de colocación planeada con el trabajador social?

APPENDIX H: NIH TRAINING CERTIFICATE

NIH Training Certificate



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