FOSTER PARENT SATISFACTION WITH THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM AND THEIR INTENTIONS TO DECERTIFICATION

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FOSTER PARENTS' SATISFACTION WITH THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM AND THEIR INTENTION TO DECERTIFICATION

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Karla Paulina Valdez
June 2019
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Approved by:

Janet Chang, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work
Janet Chang, M.S.W. Research Coordinator
ABSTRACT

Foster home placement has been gradually decreasing and this study focused on foster parents’ support system and the reasons leading to decertification. Specifically, this study aimed to find out how foster parents felt about the foster agency and other child protective services agencies. This study targeted the foster care system within an agency located in Riverside, California. The research method used in the study was post positivism, which was a paradigm that allowed flexibility within the study, using qualitative data-gathering methods such as face-to-face interviews in the foster homes. Nine foster parents participated in the study. The results of the study showed that foster parents in the study were satisfied with the agency, but wanted more praise from the social workers and agency. The study also found that the majority of the participants had difficulties with county social workers and therapists. A recommendation for the agency is to bridge the communication gap among other child protective services agencies, agency social workers, and foster parents and continuously put forth efforts to inform the foster parents of foster care changes. Another recommendation is that the agency hold foster parent appreciation events to demonstrate to the foster parents how much they are valued and appreciated.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** ............................................................................................................................................................ iii

**CHAPTER ONE: ASSESSMENT**

- **Introduction** .......................................................................................................................................................... 1
- **Research Focus, Statement, or Question** ............................................................................................................... 2
- **Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm** ..................................................................................................... 3
- **Literature Review** .................................................................................................................................................... 4
  - **Negative Decertification** .................................................................................................................................. 6
  - **Improving Foster Parents** .................................................................................................................................. 7
  - **Allegations** .......................................................................................................................................................... 8
  - **Positive Decertification** .................................................................................................................................... 9
- **Theoretical Orientation** .......................................................................................................................................... 9
- **Potential Contribution to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice** ................................................................. 10
- **Summary** ............................................................................................................................................................. 10

**CHAPTER TWO: ENGAGEMENT**

- **Introduction** .......................................................................................................................................................... 11
- **Study Site** .............................................................................................................................................................. 11
- **Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site** .................................................................................. 12
- **Diversity Issues** .................................................................................................................................................... 13
- **Ethical Issues** ........................................................................................................................................................ 14
- **Political Issues** ..................................................................................................................................................... 14
- **The Role of Technology in Engagement** ........................................................................................................ 16
CHAPTER THREE: IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction .............................................................. 17
Study Participants ....................................................... 17
   Selection of Participants .......................................... 18
Data Gathering .......................................................... 19
Phases of Data Collection ............................................ 21
Data Recording .......................................................... 22
Data Analysis ............................................................ 24
Termination and Follow Up .......................................... 24
Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan .......... 25
Summary ....................................................................... 25

CHAPTER FOUR: EVALUATION

Introduction .................................................................. 26
Data Analysis ................................................................ 26
Data Interpretation ....................................................... 29
Implication of Findings for Micro and Macro Practice .... 30
Summary ....................................................................... 32

CHAPTER FIVE: TERMINATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Introduction ............................................................... 33
Termination of Study .................................................... 33
Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants ................. 34
Dissemination Plan ........................................................................................................34

APPENDIX A: STUDY MATERIALS.................................................................................36

APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL ..........................40

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................42
CHAPTER ONE

ASSESSMENT

Introduction

This research is a study of the foster care system, focusing on foster parents and their desire to discontinue engagement with the foster care system. Foster parents take on a lot of work and responsibility. When they accept a child into their home, they also must commit to the child’s/children’s needs, such as taking them to see their biological parents for visitation, keeping up with the child’s cultural traditions, and aiding the child with any trauma they endured. The child’s arrival also means that the family dynamics for the home will change (either in a positive or negative way); also, along with the children, the foster parents must also accept a team of other people in their home such as agency social workers, county social workers, and other agents as necessary. The team of people who are there to support the children and families question the foster parent’s intentions on a regular basis and are extremely intrusive. This could deter foster parents from continuing to foster.

This chapter covers the fact that the number of foster homes have been gradually decreasing, and it focuses on foster parent’s support system leading to decertification. The literature review focuses on foster parent challenges and explores many of the reasons they choose to stop fostering. Lastly, this chapter explores both the micro and macro contributions to social work.
Research Focus, Statement, or Question

A certified foster home is a home where the adults have completed all training and met all qualifications required to be eligible to foster children. However, homes are being decertified faster than they are being certified. Foster home decertification is when a certified home either relinquishes their certification with their agency, or the agency revokes it. Foster parents are being decertified for a variety of reasons: sometimes by choice, other times due to the judgement of the agency. The focus of this research is to address the reasons for foster parent decertification.

Since foster parents are the main focus of the study, it is important to recognize that foster parents need a lot of support in order to effectively help foster children. Gatekeepers from the selected agency that is the focus of this study have approved the conducted research due to the fact that foster homes are in short supply- the number of certified homes for this agency has been gradually declining. They have expressed concern that the agency has been experiencing a surplus of foster child referrals but there are not enough foster homes to accommodate these children. The director stated that she has been contacted by county social workers regarding children who have been sitting at CPS offices, going into higher levels of care and entering shelters because of the lack of foster homes. There have also been a large amount of sibling sets entering the system who are unfortunately split up into multiple homes and
agencies because there are just not enough beds or homes to keep them (P. E., personal communication, September 30, 2017).

Homes are also being decertified faster than they are being certified. In the last year, the agency has certified five homes but has decertified twenty-five. Foster parents are embracing retirement, burning out, or making inexcusable mistakes. Out of the twenty-five homes that were decertified, four of them were due to inexcusable mistakes (P. E., personal communication, February 27, 2018). Admittedly, fostering children is not an easy task. Foster families have to endure many different challenges. First, when there is a foster child in the home, there is really no such thing as privacy. There are people coming in and out of the home on a weekly basis. Foster parent’s actions and intentions are constantly being evaluated, which sometimes leads to home investigations. When the foster home goes under investigation, every little thing they have done or said to that point is scrutinized. Foster parents are under a microscope which leads them to feel like they are missing support, resources or a combination of the both which could lead to not desiring to continue to foster.

Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

The research study was developed upon the assumption that an objective reality exists with ongoing and unchanging laws and structures, therefore, post positivism was the paradigm used. With the post positivism approach, I was able to use qualitative data gathering methods in the foster homes. This is a process
of continually exploring, opening up and developing research through qualitative measurement and hypothesis testing and beyond (Morris, 2014). By utilizing the post positivist method, I hoped to determine and evaluate the reasons people decide to no longer foster children. This method is best for this type of research because it allows for continuous development of the research to better explore and understand the reason foster parents stop fostering.

Another reason post positivism is being used is because this paradigm allows a researcher to approach the problem by utilizing a variety of factors beyond personal knowledge. It allows a researcher to engage the participant’s opinion and perspective, which further allows the foster parents to clarify their perspective. This in turn gives them a chance to reshape the focus of the study. This paradigm takes a qualitative approach which focuses on building theory by obtaining specific feedback from the foster parents in a naturalistic setting. Qualitative research also allows a higher amount of dialogue between the foster parents and the researcher in order to better assess the reasons foster parents become uncertified and the possible solutions.

Literature Review

This section will be discussing the foster parent process leading up to certification. It also covers what decertification is and the different types of decertification. Decertification is done for a variety of reasons which could be either positive or negative. These reasons will also be covered in this section.
Motivations to become a foster parent consist but are not limited to “filling an ‘empty nest’, wanting to adopt children, increasing family size, or providing a companion for an only child” (Macgregor, Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006, p. 353). According to Rodger (2006), foster parent satisfaction is directly correlated with their relationship with agency social workers; therefore they must feel informed and respected.

Foster parents must undergo a series of classes and procedures in order to become foster parents. According to the California Department of Social Services (2018), perspective foster parents must complete pre-approval training as specified by their county. The participating agency uses a training program called PRIDE (parent resources for information, development, and education) which is a “14-step model of practice to develop and support foster and adoptive families as team members in child protection and trauma-informed care” (Child Welfare League of America, 2016, para. 4). Upon completion of the PRIDE training, foster parents must also become CPS, first aid, and water certified. Once these steps are complete, the prospective foster parents must undergo a finger print and DMV background check (California Department of Social Services, 2018).

Foster parents must also undergo a psychosocial assessment (a.k.a. home study) conducted by one of the agency social workers, and prepare their homes for children (California Department of Social Services, 2018). The psychosocial assessment consists of “written application, autobiographies,
references, interviews, participation in meeting and training, background checks, housing assessments for health and safety, and information from other required documents” (Rapshaw, 2002, p. 19).

Foster parents prepare their homes for children by complying with agency and mandated state rules and regulations such as locking up medication and weapons (California Department of Social Services, 2018). Once their home is acceptable, they have proven to be law-abiding citizens, they are trustworthy to foster children, and they finish all of the training courses, they are then certified under a foster agencies license (C. K., personal communication, February 27, 2018). However, even with all this preparation, a foster parent’s certification could be revoked at any time (this is known as decertification). There are many reasons for decertification in foster care, both negative and positive.

Negative Decertification

Foster parents can go through negative decertification for a variety of reasons consisting but not limited to: inadequate support by the agency, lack of sufficient communication between all involved parties, and the challenging level of care that some foster children require. Becoming a foster parent “can be extremely difficult, given the damage that has been done to many maltreated children” (Holden, 2015, p. 306). Foster parents play a unique role; they are expected to not only tackle whatever trauma the child may have endured but to also provide love, affection, security: essentially parenting another person’s child.
There are many stressors associated with the foster care system. Foster parents are expected to “provide all the normal parenting functions as well as several unique ones” in a very short period of time (Holden, 2015, p. 306). Many children entering the system are older and they often come with trauma that must be addressed. Foster parents must learn what the trauma is and how it affects the individual child, and then advocate for the child to receive any necessary services, such as therapy.

According to Berrick (2009), “Almost 40% of the foster parents quit during the first year of service, and an additional 20% report plans to discontinue care in the foreseeable future” (p. 83). Holden (2015) stated that “the most frequent reasons cited include inadequate agency support (40%), poor communication with foster care workers (33%), and that the children were too difficult to handle (34%)” (p. 306). Without proper support and guidance, foster parents could make a mistake that leads to negative decertification.

**Improving Foster Parents**

According to the California Department of Social Services (2018), in order to become foster parents, people must first undergo initial training sessions and in order to maintain the certification, foster parents must continue to attend trainings throughout the year. Beyond that, there are more specialized areas they have to be familiar with, such as trauma-informed care, crisis intervention, and emancipation and independent living (California Department of Social Services, 2018). Ways to improve foster parent satisfaction with placement as well as with
the agency consist of improving the foster parent’s skill and sensitivity training; promoting open communication and feedback, in-home family counseling, and helping them address children’s unique behaviors (Gopal & Singh, 2011). When foster parents are well informed in terms of foster children and their needs, they can better teach and model “normal” behavior to the children.

**Allegations**

When foster parents take in children, they run the chance of being accused of child abuse themselves by the child or an outside source (California Department of Social Services, 2018). According to Rapshaw (2002), “When it happens, it is an ordeal” (p. 45). Foster parents are trained in ways to treat foster children as well as in positive forms of discipline (California Department of Social Services, 2018). The training equips the foster parents with ways to appropriately discipline children who have suffered trauma. However, foster parents may be reported and investigated due to allegations. “Only a suspicion of child abuse or neglect is required to file a report to initiate an investigation” (Rapshaw, 2002, p. 148). These allegations may consist of (but are not limited to) physical abuse or neglect. A foster parent may be investigated for something as simple as the child having a scraped knee if someone reports it as suspected child abuse. “When investigating a complaint, a County shall take reasonable steps to ascertain the validity of the complaint” (California Department of Social Services, 2018, p. 52). Investigations are intrusive and detailed. The foster parents, along with their families, are interviewed extensively and the foster parent’s integrity is
questioned and scrutinized. However, when the allegations are false, “the
investigation almost always will clear [the foster parent] of any wrong doing
(Rapshaw, 2002, pg.46).

Positive Decertification

While there is a lot of negative decertification, foster parents also leave on
good notes. Foster parents also experience positive decertification such as when
the children are formally adopted into the family (Berrick, 2009). Foster parents
may also decide to retire from fostering after many years of helping children. At
this point, the foster parent relinquishes their certification voluntarily.

Theoretical Orientation

Systems theory was utilized because it coincides with the post positivist
paradigm. Systems theory is “a set of unifying principles about the organization
and functioning of the systems” (Levine & Munsch, 2011, p. 6). It “explains
human behavior as the intersection of the influences of multiple interrelated
systems” (Social Work License Map, 2018, para. 3).

System theory has a variety of practice interventions that vary greatly
depending on the context (Social Work License Map, 2018). However, for this
study, strengthening one part of the system to improve the whole is the best
approach. The foster care system consists of interrelated parts. In order to care
for foster children, foster parents must collaborate with a variety of subsystems,
such as the foster agency, the county workers, the biological family, school
officials, and many other outside sources. If the bond between the foster parents and foster agencies is not a strong collaboration, other subsystems will diminish as well. Strengthening the foster parent-foster agency relationship can improve the foster parents experience as a whole, and will encourage them to continue to want to foster children.

Potential Contribution to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice

I am confident that the study will contribute to the social work practice by better pinpointing foster parent concerns. Foster parents tend to struggle with a variety of issues and need constant support and guidance in order to better help the children under their care. It is important to find ways for foster parents to feel comfortable enough to ask for appropriate assistance when they need it. The foster parents also need to feel confident when taking care of foster children because although fostering is a noble and fulfilling task, it also adds extra stressors to families. However, with proper support from social workers and other outside sources, increasing the positive aspects and decreasing the negative can be accomplished.

Summary

Chapter one discussed the research topic and the reasons for the decline of certified homes. It also covered the reasons for choosing to apply the post-positivist paradigm and the goals of this study.
CHAPTER TWO

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

This chapter covers the engagement phases of the research. It discusses the focus of the research and the engagement of the gatekeepers of the agency. Self-preparation needed for the research as well as the diversity, ethical, and political issues are also covered.

Study Site

The study took place at a foster family agency serving in Southern California. The agency’s mission is to provide safety, comfort and healing to children suffering abuse and abandonment; to teach love and trust; and to instill self-esteem, values and hope for the future. In so doing, it also hopes to assist children trapped in hopelessness and despair become compassionate and contributing members of the community. The agency focuses on youths and works with a large variety of people ranging from 0-24 years of age. The company provides a number of services consisting of group homes, foster families, job training and education, chaplaincy, and kin care. The group homes consist of both probation and social service children ranging from 13-18 years of age. The foster families foster children from newborns to 21 year-olds. The job training and education programs assist young adults ranging from 16-24 years of age. The chaplaincy program serves all of the agency’s children; the program...
provides study materials and other faith-based needs as well as giving children an opportunity to attend religious camps. The kin care program helps people who are caring for a family member’s child; they connect caregivers to resources and teach them how to navigate the social service system.

The foster family branch is the focus of this study. Foster children enter the foster care system for many reasons and are typically placed by a county worker. Some reasons for placement are: newborn drug exposure, child sexual abuse, physical abuse, or neglect. The majority of foster parents within this agency prefer children under the age of 10. The reason it is harder to place older children in foster homes is because older foster children tend to have a higher amount of identified “mental health needs or a history of running away, aggressive behavior, or using drugs or alcohol” that foster parents are not equipped or willing to deal with” (Abramo & Ray, 2018, para. 35).

Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

The agency is currently experiencing a shortage of foster homes; therefore the gatekeeper (foster agency director) was open to new ideas and suggestions, and had in fact already been engaged in conversations about the possibility of conducting a study at her facility. The gatekeeper and I sat down together and brainstormed possible research project topics. Initially, she wanted the research to be focused on foster child satisfaction with the agency but she was informed that it would most likely not pass the human subject committee.
After exploring other research ideas, we decided to focus on foster parents’ satisfaction with the agency and the high amount of decertification.

Diversity Issues

I kept in mind that foster parents come from different genders, cultures, beliefs and social economic status which might cause them to express themselves differently, so I was prepared to adjust my individual approaches accordingly. Most foster homes in this agency consist of both a foster mother and a foster father, with the exception of a handful of single parent homes (P. E., personal communication, September 30, 2017). It is understandable that single parents sometimes experience unique issues and stressors because they may not have the same level of support as someone with a spouse, who can share the new burdens foster parenting will inevitably bring. I took into consideration such added stressors when determining the likelihood of their continuation in fostering children.

The dimensions of diversity that needed to be taken into consideration were physical abilities, religious beliefs, and race or ethnicity. Foster parents also come from variety of ages and backgrounds. With such diversity arise unique concerns. What one person may find challenging, others may not. Some foster parents may find it difficult to drive children back and forth to appointments, for example, because of physical limitations due to age or even past injuries. Other foster parents may find accommodating children of different religious
backgrounds difficult. Yet still other foster parents may find it difficult to foster children whose race or ethnicity bring specialized challenges, such as caring for differently textured hair. It is important to empathize with all such unique challenges and approach their answers and concerns with consideration to their perspectives.

Ethical Issues

I took measures to ensure the confidentiality of data. All confidential foster parent information was kept in the agency’s office in order to protect the confidentiality of the foster parents. When I was in need of data, the information was available in the office. All confidential data was locked in the agency’s office when not in use. Identifying information (e.g., name, address, and phone number) remained anonymous. All the completed surveys and audio recordings were erased and/or destroyed after the study was completed.

Political Issues

The ways that foster parents foster are beginning to shift in California. First, foster parents are switching to a new title; they are being converted to being “resource” parents. Resource parents have the ability to foster and adopt children. Although not all people who foster children want to adopt, it makes it easier for those who do. Secondly, foster parents have been receiving reimbursements for caring for children based on the age of the child. These
reimbursements are the monetary compensation the foster parent obtains for caring for a foster child. As of December 1, 2017, California began a new reimbursement system, which is being implemented in phases but will ultimately switch all children to a new level of care reimbursement which will be based on a quantitative form that assesses what foster parents do and how much they should be reimbursed. Under this new system, the foster parents will be held accountable for how “hands-on” they are with the foster children. What foster parents do will be the main focus of the reimbursement, not the child’s behaviors and/or needs (California Department of Social Services, 2018). This could potentially be an added stressor for foster parents.

The political changes will affect the study by adding complexity to the paperwork process. However, in the long run, it could take away some of the foster parents’ stressors. The new level of care focuses not on the age of the child but on their individualized needs. The foster parents will be compensated for the time, effort, and finances that they put out. At times, young children require a lot of appointments that foster parents must spend a lot of time on and it could be financially straining. The new system acknowledges such unique needs and will address and validate the foster parent’s efforts. Hopefully this will help decrease decertification in the long run.
The Role of Technology in Engagement

Technology was not utilized in regards to engaging the gatekeeper. All of the communication between myself and the gatekeepers has been face-to-face communication. Foster parents were contacted via phone and/or text message. Once the interviewing process began, I utilized technology through recording devices. The recorded data was documented into a computer system in order to track data.

Summary

This chapter covered the engagement phases of the research. It discussed the focus of the research and the gatekeepers of the agency. Self-preparation needed for the research and details the diversity, ethical, and new political issues were also covered.
CHAPTER THREE
IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the implementation phases of the research. It discusses the study participants and how they will be selected. Gathering data, phases of data collecting, data recording and data analysis, terminations and follow-ups will also be covered.

Study Participants

The participating agency currently has 62 certified foster homes in Riverside County, with years of service ranging from 0-15 years. Seventeen homes have been with the agency for over 5 years, 8 homes have been with the agency for 15 years, 12 homes have been with the agency for 12 years, 5 of the families have been with the agency for 3 years, 12 of the families have been with the agency for 2 years, 4 families have been with the agency for 1 year, and 4 of the families have been with the agency for under a year. From these 62 homes, 26 of them are reported as bilingual. Of the 62 homes, 11 did not disclose their ethnicity, 30 identified as “Hispanic”, 10 as “White”, 6 as “Asian”, 3 as “Black”, and 2 as “Other”. The foster parents are able to foster between 1 to 6 children depending on their home capacity. No home is allowed to have more than 6 children; this includes biological and adopted children.
Selection of Participants

For the purpose of this study, foster parents from the participating agency were selected. Requirements were that they had been foster parents for over one year, had actively participated with the agency within the last year, and had experienced difficulties with the children who were been placed in their homes. Such difficulties with the foster care system consisted but were not limited to families who asked for foster children to be removed from their homes, foster families who underwent child abuse investigations because of the children they foster, and foster parents who had long-term placements who go home.

When participants were selected, the focus was on their satisfaction with the foster care system and their intent to continue to foster children. In order to answer these questions, only specific families who have had challenges with the foster care system were chosen. Due to the very specific population that must be observed, the sampling strategy that was utilized was homogeneous purposive sampling. A purposive sample is the selection “of a sample based on your own judgement about which units are most representative or useful” (Rubin & Babbie, 2016, p. 148). “A homogeneous purposive sample is one that is selected for having a shared characteristic or set of characteristics” (Crossman, 2018, para. 4). Because this study is focusing on the homogeneous foster parent population, this approach was the most appropriate.

Foster parents from the participating agency were screened through the agency to ensure that they met the criteria and then were contacted and
interviewed. Foster parents were asked about their experience with foster care including specific questions about the agency and the children.

Data Gathering

In the attempt to search for regularities and patterns, data gathering was performed as a series of face-to-face open-ended interviews. Questions were structured to help expand on topics. These structured questions also utilized inclusion questions such as asking the foster parent about their feelings (Do you feel like you are prepared to care for the children that are placed with you?); verification questions which were used to elaborate on the questions to provide clarity to the study (Why did you become a foster parent? What was your motivation?); and substitution frame questions which required fill-in-the-blank answers from the foster parent (When I think of getting a new placement, I feel ______.). Such questions allowed them to respond on their own in order for me to get a better understanding of what they know (Morris, 2014).

The questions touched on topics such as how the foster parents felt about the foster care system, how they felt about the children they serviced, their satisfaction with the agency, and their satisfaction with the county. Documents regarding current events that have happened within the home such as incident reports, community licensing investigations and other contact notes were reviewed and discussed with the foster parents (California Department of Social Services – Community Care Licensing findings are online for public viewing). As
the interviews developed, the participants were asked to elaborate on their answers and they were given the opportunity to express thoughts and concerns.

While conducting the interview, it was important to keep an open mind and be flexible in regards to phases of the discussion. Every foster family is different and must be approached in such way. While it was important to be familiar with engagement, development of focus, maintaining focus, and termination, I also worked at the pace of the foster parent and did not expect each interview to work in the same way. However, while it was important to be flexible during the interviews, it was also important to stick to the subject. Essential questions were asked along with extra questions in order to check for consistency, and probing questions to acquire elaboration on certain topics. I also read when a person was becoming stressed; tired, or uncomfortable, and inserted “throw away” questions that allowed a change in climate (i.e. “Tell me a good memory of a previous question”). Lastly, I followed through with termination.

Once the consent form was signed and the interviews were complete, I conducted a document review of the foster parent’s records and reviewed previous satisfaction reviews. The documents did not have any confidential or personal information. While conducting this study, foster parent information was only released with their signed consent. Foster child information is confidential and was not disclosed to me.
Phases of Data Collection

During the first phase, the foster parents from the agency were screened through the agency’s documents and recommendations in order to determine which ones were best suited for the study. The people chosen for the study were determined in collaboration between the gatekeeper and me. People who were eligible for the study were people who had been fostering for over a year and had experienced stressors during their placements such as investigations or long-term placements leaving. After choosing those who were most suited for the study, the second phase consisted of building rapport by engaging the selected foster parents through phone conversations and face-to-face interactions; during this phase, the research project and its process (such as voice recording) were explained to the foster parents. Risks and benefits were also explained to the foster parents (see Appendix A). There were no foreseeable immediate or long-term risks to the foster parents who participated in the study. They were informed that they may initially feel uncomfortable answering certain questions about the agency in fear that the agency would become upset with them. To alleviate these fears, they were informed that their answers would be disclosed but their identities would not. However, they were also advised that they were to answer questions as they felt fit and could refuse to answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable. A direct benefit to the foster parents is that the foster agency would be made aware of concerns that may lead to decertification. The agency will then be able to adjust some of their procedures in order to better serve and
support all of the foster parents. During this time, the foster parents were given
the opportunity to ask questions and accept or decline to participate in the
research project.

The foster parents who decided to participate in the research study were
given a consent form for the research and voice recording study to sign. Once
the consent form was signed and all questions and concerns were answered, the
following phase consisted of scheduling interviews with the foster parents. The
interviews were voice recorded (if the foster parents consented to it) and consist
of open-ended and probing questions. Although there was voice recording, I also
took notes during the interviews. After all questions were answered, the final
phase was termination. During the termination phase, the foster parents were
allowed to ask any lingering questions they had, and they were thanked for their
participation. After the conclusion of each interview, the recorded data was
transcribed, analyzed and included into the research project.

Data Recording
Choosing a recording method is important. The method must be
conducted in a way that does not make the foster parents nervous while still
being able to obtain all the information that is needed. There are many ways to
record information. It is also a trial and error. Most foster parents did not consent
to voice recording. Since recording was not working; I was able to switch up.
Recording the interviews could be beneficial when analyzing the data; it gives a
researcher the opportunity to listen back on the interview in order to ensure that all data gets analyzed without accidentally omitting any information. However, short notes and reflection journals were used and they were also beneficial as they assisted with noting important topics. Taking notes helped with the process of information and it helped develop questions to ask the foster parents.

Keeping a journal was of further benefit when conducting interviews. When documenting in journals, key words and phrases that helped develop the research project were written down. The journal was used to note down observational data and meaningful quotes that were said during the interview. Another way the journal was utilized was to help me process my own thoughts, feelings, and impressions about the experiences of the foster parents and their desire to continue to foster.

Before departing from the interview, I obtained feedback from the foster parents in order to get their feelings about the interview; this feedback could help with future interviews. I documented the reflections of the interview quickly. Quick documentation helped to reflect not only on the data collected but also on what worked and what did not work. Again, it was important to continuously develop the questions as the research project progresses in order to get the best results from the interviews.
Data Analysis

Interviewing foster parents was the main goal of the study; recorded interviews and the journals served as the main source of data collection for analysis. The data collection allowed me to find any group patterns such as the foster parents feeling overwhelmed, foster parents not feeling supported, and the desire to stop fostering. Reasons for these responses could stem from a number of places including difficult placements or child abuse investigations. I had the opportunity to interpret what the foster parents said and correlate it to why they do not wish to foster any more children.

Termination and Follow Up

Termination was discussed during initial contact and information on to how to obtain the study’s findings was on the consent form. After the study was completed, participants as well as other parties involved were notified via letter. The letter consisted of thanking the foster parents for their participation, my contact information, and instructions on how to obtain the study’s findings.

The gatekeepers were thanked face-to-face and were provided with written information on to how to obtain the study’s findings. All appropriate parties have the information on how to obtain the study’s findings; therefore, there is no need to follow up after the research study is completed.
Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan

Findings were communicated to gatekeepers and the study site. Foster parents are able to obtain the findings, but will have to obtain them on their own. I provided a copy of the findings to the gatekeepers.

Summary

This chapter covered the implementation phases of the research. It discussed the study participants and how they were selected. Gathering data, phases of data collecting, data recording and data analysis, terminations and follow-ups were also covered.
CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION

Introduction

This chapter covers the data analysis of the participants’ responses. It also covers data interpretation of the findings. Lastly, the implications of findings for micro and macro practice are covered.

Data Analysis

From the 62 certified foster homes, 9 foster parents were interviewed. The 9 foster parents consisted of 7 females and 2 males. Of the participants, 6 participants were Hispanic, 2 were Caucasian, and 1 was Asian. The participants have been foster parents for over 6 years on average, have actively participated with the agency within the last year, and have experienced difficulties with the children who have been placed in their homes. Difficulties with the foster care system consist but are not limited to families who have asked for foster children to be removed from their homes, foster families who have undergone child abuse investigations because of the children they foster, and foster parents who have had long-term placements who go home.

When participants were asked why they decided to become foster parents, the majority of participants answered along the lines that they wanted to have a bigger family. Participant #6 stated, “I always wanted a big family and I
could not have children.” When asked what the strength of the foster agency is in the support they receive, all participants reported that they receive support. For example, Participant #1 stated “Always there and eager to answer questions and they’re quick to response.”

The responses when they were asked about the deficits of the agency were split; four out of the nine participants stated that there were no deficits. However, another four participants stated that the agency was disconnected from county and county policies and procedures. Participant #1 stated that there needs to be more “communication regarding policies and procedures [and] more updates regarding county and state [policies].”

When participants were asked if they were prepared to care for the children placed with them, all of the participants stated that they were prepared. When participants were asked if the child population has changed within the years, four participants stated that the children’s behavior has worsened. Participant #4 stated “Yes more daring, understand the system, know what they could get away with, [they are] disrespectful, entitled.” However, one participant stated that they were the same, and the remainder of the participants stated that they were not able to determine if the children were different.

Participants were asked to fill in the blank for the following question: “When I think of getting a new placement, I feel ____.” A majority of the participants (5 participants) reported that they felt excitement and love. However,
three participants stated that they felt nervous and the last participant answered that she felt stressed.

When the participants were asked if they had undergone a child abuse investigation, all but one participant stated that they had. Three participants have undergone one investigation, two participants have undergone two investigations, and one participant has undergone seven investigations. Even one participant has undergone fifteen investigations. A majority (5 participants) out of the eight participants who have undergone an investigation reported that they felt supported. Participant #4, who has undergone 15 investigations stated, “Yes, only once we did not feel supported and it was when we were not aware that you could not restraint a child.” However, Participant #2 disclosed that she did not feel supported by saying, “No never, [we] felt alone.”

When participants were asked about the strengths and deficits in the support they received from outside support resources, their responses were split. Four participants stated that they have never had a problem with outside agencies. Participant #2 stated, “CSW’s [county social workers] are good, helpful, no problem”. However, five participants reported having difficulties with county social workers and therapists. For example, Participant #9 stated, “Most county employees are unreliable and they always side with biological parents, makes us feel like we’re not enough.”
When participants were asked if they would like to continue to foster, all participants answered that they wished to continue to foster. Participant #3 answered with a simple “yes”.

When participants were asked what ways the agency could improve their retention strategies to maintain foster parents, there were mixed answers. Three participants stated that there was nothing to do, while two participants indicated that there was more to do. For example, one participant stated that there needed to be more foster parent praise and appreciation, and another Participant #7 stated that “county social workers, agency social workers and foster parents need to be a team.”

Data Interpretation

The study found that most foster parents wanted to help children, start a family, and/or have a bigger family. This finding coincides with Macgregor, et al. (2006) who found that people decided to foster because of “family dynamics such as filling an 'empty nest', wanting to adopt children, increasing family size, or providing a companion for an only child” (p. 353).

The present study also found that all the foster parents in the study were satisfied with the agency services, although some of them wanted more from it. They wanted more praise and appreciation from the system as well as close collaboration among county social workers, agency social workers, and foster parents. The finding is also supported by Denby, Rinfleisch, and Bean’s (1999)
study that found that foster parents must feel informed and respected and that their satisfaction was directly correlated with their relationship with agency social workers.

This study revealed that all participants received support from their foster care agency and social workers. One foster parent even stated that the agency was “always there and eager to answer questions.” However, a majority of the participants (5 participants) also stated that they had difficulties with county social workers and therapists. It appears that most participants felt that their needs were not met in certain areas. Consistent with this finding, Holden (2015) stated that “the most frequent reasons cited include inadequate agency support (40%), poor communication with foster care workers (33%), and that the children were too difficult to handle (34%)” (p.306).

Implication of Findings for Micro and Macro Practice

Foster parents in this study indicated that they wanted to become a foster parent largely due to their desire to help children, start a family, and have a bigger family. Most foster parents in the study also stated that when they think of getting a new placement, they feel love, hope, and excitement.

On a macro level, the placing county must continue to adequately assess children and disclose all information so that foster parents continue to be excited for placement and not afraid that they might get a child that they cannot handle. When foster parents are aware of children’s behaviors and medical concerns
prior to placement, they are better equipped to accept or deny the placement.

Foster families must feel comfortable in order to achieve placement stability and increase the possibility that the child may become an integrate part of the family.

Agency workers also need to prepare and train foster parents to help them deal with difficult children effectively. Children in foster care sometimes endured some sort of abuse and they may express their feelings through behaviors. Foster parents are put into a position where they must manage such difficult behaviors, and thus must sometimes restructure the way they manage their home. Corporal punishment is unacceptable and foster parents must find alternatives to managing and correcting behavior, such as positive reinforcement.

Satisfaction with the agency, although good, still needs some work. Agency social workers need to verbally praise and reassure the foster parents on a regular basis. Foster parents serve as role models for the children placed in their homes and they often become mentors for their foster child. These things are done purely to help children and they should be commended. It is strongly recommended that the agency hold foster parent appreciation events to demonstrate to the foster parents how much they are valued and appreciated.

Some participants stated that they have difficulties with county social workers and that they wanted county social workers, agency social workers and foster parents to be a team. This finding points to a critical need for the three parties to collaborate with each other in an open forum so that everyone is on the
same page and works together closely to produce the best outcomes for foster children and their foster families.

Summary

This chapter covered the data analysis of the participant’s responses. It also covered data interpretation of the findings and the implications of findings for micro and/or macro practice.
CHAPTER FIVE
TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

Introduction

This chapter covers the ending of my relationship with the foster agency and an explanation of my decision to terminate contact. It also covers how I will discuss the communication of my findings. Also, an evaluation of what the study achieved for the study participants will be discussed along with what is to come for the foster parents and the agency. Lastly, a dissemination plan for the study will be discussed.

Termination of Study

As the study has ended, after debriefing with gatekeepers, there is no longer need to keep in contact with the agency in regards to the study. The foster parents were informed about termination during the initial contact and information on to how to obtain the study’s findings was on the informed consent form provided. The gatekeepers have been thanked face-to-face and were provided with written information on to how to obtain the study’s findings. All appropriate parties have the information on how to obtain the study’s findings; therefore, termination is appropriate.
Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

The present study found that foster parents in the study were overall satisfied with the agency services. Most foster parents wanted to help children, start a family, and/or have a bigger family. They also expressed that they wanted more praise and appreciation from the system as well as close collaboration among county social workers, agency social workers, and foster parents. Gatekeepers have agreed to speak with agency social workers to encourage them to verbally praise and reassure the foster parents on a regular basis. The agency has also agreed to hold foster parent appreciation events to demonstrate to the foster parents how much they are valued and appreciated. The relationship with the county is not something that the agency could control; however, they are putting effort to inform the foster parents of any changes in a prompt manner.

I see that the agency is working hard to mend relationships and are making an effort to not only properly train foster parents but also make them feel appreciated. The agency is accepting suggestions and they are adjusting accordingly. It seems like the current foster parents are going to continue to foster.

Dissemination Plan

The targeted audiences for this study are social work students, foster parents, foster family agency social workers, child protective services workers, and any other foster care stakeholder.
The message to the audience is that foster parent satisfaction with the foster agency, and their thoughts on foster care and what could be done to improve communication, are important. This message is important to students, foster parents, foster family agency social workers, child protective services workers, along with any other foster care stakeholder because it may help to identify flaws in the foster care system and suggest ways to mend these flaws in order to enable foster parents to continue to foster children.

This report will be submitted to California State University, San Bernardino Graduate Studies through Scholarworks(online) for evaluation. Once approved, the report will be admitted to the school library database for others to read. Furthermore, the study will be discussed in person with both the foster family agency director and the executive director.
APPENDIX A

STUDY MATERIALS
INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine Foster Parent Decertification in California. The study is being conducted by Karla Valdez a MSW student under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chang, professor in the School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-Committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine foster parents satisfaction with the foster care system and their intentions to continue to foster children or decertify.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked of questions on their current satisfaction with the agency, agency social workers, county social workers, foster children population and other related outside sources.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY: Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take 15-30 minutes to complete the survey.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

BENEFITS: A direct benefit to the foster parents is the foster agencies aware of the concerns that may lead to decertification's. CFLC will then be able to adjust some of their procedures in order to better serve and support all of the foster parents.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Janet Chang at 909-537-5184 (email: jchang@csusb.edu).

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfaul Library ScholarWorks (http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2019.
Questionnaire created by Karla Paulina Valdez, 2018
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
This study you have just completed was designed to examine foster parents satisfaction with the foster care system and their intentions to continue to foster children or decertify. We are interested in assessing the current satisfaction with the foster agency, agency social workers, county social workers, foster children population and other related outside sources. This is to inform you that no deception is involved in this study. Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Janet Chang at 909-537-5184. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact the ScholarWorks database (http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/) after July 2019.
APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee

Researcher(s): Karla Valdez

Proposal Title: Foster Parent Decertification

#_SW1874

Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.

Proposal is:

X approved

— to be resubmitted with revisions listed below

— to be forwarded to the campus IRB for review

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

— Investigators’ signature missing

— missing informed consent — debriefing statement

— revisions needed in informed consent — debriefing

— data collection instruments revision

— agency approval letter missing

— CITI missing

— revisions in design needed (specified below)

                   5/4/2018
Committee Chair Signature

Date

Distribution:  White-Coordinator; Yellow-Supervisor; Pink-Student
REFERENCES


