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The Effects of Trauma from Multiple Placements of Foster Youth

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THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA FROM MULTIPLE PLACEMENTS
FOR FOSTER YOUTH

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
Savannah Jayne Perez

June 2019

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ABSTRACT

Over the course of several decades, the foster youth population continues to grow due to various forms of abuse that have occurred in the biological home. Many foster children experience multiple placements which ultimately cause a significant amount of trauma due to placement instability. The study examined trauma of instability among foster youth and discussed interventions that could be implemented when working with resource families and foster youth within the field of social work.

A post-positivism paradigm was used to focus on understanding the trauma of placement instability. A total of six face-to-face interviews of master's level social workers were conducted to obtain qualitative data. The interviews consisted of a variety of both descriptive, structural, and contrast questions to explore trauma and common behaviors of foster youth who experienced instability. All data obtained from the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding by traditional means. Content analysis was used to identify four themes: Impact of Multiple Placements, Useful Interventions, Benefits of Stability, and Family Characteristics. The following research study contributes to social work practice by providing useful interventions such as: teaching, modeling, self-regulation and self-awareness techniques for youth and foster families to address instability. This also includes training families to be trauma-informed caretakers and pre-

screening foster families to identify the best match for children to reduce instability.

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to all the children who are victims of abuse and who continue to search for their Forever Family. You are not alone in this search for love and belonging.

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CHAPTER ONE

ASSESSMENT

Introduction

The research focus of the study incorporates literature reviews that discuss the themes of the study. To properly address the topic in a structured manner, the paradigm chosen to structure the study is explained. This explanation emphasizes the need for the given structure, highlighting its potential contributions to micro social work practice. Lastly, this chapter addresses the theoretical orientation through the post positivist paradigm “to develop an inductive understanding of the problem focus” (Morris, 2013).

Effects of Placement Instability

Over the course of several decades, the foster youth population continues to grow, due to various forms of abuse that may have occurred in the biological home. Within the U.S. in 2016, 436,551 children were reported to be in foster care in, waiting to be adopted by a loving family (Children’s Bureau, 2017). Although these children are in “homes,” many foster youth experience multiple transitions whether this may be between foster homes or even from biological homes. Such movements can also be defined as multiple transitions or placement instability. Instability can overall “be disruptive to [a child’s] connections with others and sense of emotional and social well-being” (Stott, 2011). Because of this, the focus of the research study was to identify trauma

that is a result of placement instability as well as common behavioral responses to trauma. The research also integrated founded interventions to reduce behaviors and increase unconditional care from resource families and social workers.

Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

Post-positivism paradigm recognizes an objective reality exists in a naturalistic setting. The post-positivist paradigm “approach the research setting as someone who is trying to build an understanding of what is there” (Morris, 2014). Because of this, the paradigm was used to focus on understanding trauma of placement instability on foster youth and common behaviors that are in response to such trauma. The research identified interventions and researched benefits to stability for youth as evidenced by non-verbal and verbal cues. The paradigm also permitted focus on using qualitative research methods which allowed data to be analyzed in a narrative form. This allowed for proper illustration of identified trauma of placement instability, identification of commonalities and provide implications to the field of social work.

Literature Review

The following literature review identified reasoning for the need to study trauma of placement instability for the well-being of foster youth as such impacts can transcend to adulthood.

Child Traumatic Stress

Trauma occurs in one of every four children before turning the age of 16 (The National Traumatic Stress Network n.d.). Trauma is the emotional response to a distressing event such as child abuse, loss of family members, accidents, and so many more incidences. The hindrance of one's well-being occurs when the "fight or flight" responses are triggered and adrenaline and cortisol levels increase. Although this response is appropriate when a traditional event is present, such an event hinders a child when the responses are reoccurring. Such reactions are overall distressing and can cause multiple reactions such as depressive moods, behavioral changes, difficulty sleeping, and academic challenges. Many of these reactions can potentially "develop ongoing symptoms that are diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (The National Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.) Overall, trauma can have both short and long term effects on an individual but particularly children. The responses to trauma can manifest in a child, carrying on into their adulthood, affecting their perception of people and ultimately shape or distort their world view.

Placement Instability/Multiple Transitions

Multiple placements for foster youth result in developmental challenges for children. Research shows correlation between negative development outcomes and multiple placements (Connell et al., 2006). It has also researched, children who experience such placement instability are more likely than others to show attachment difficulties and internal and external behavioral problems (Connell et

al., 2006). Although many simply interpret such placement instability as solely consisting of parental changes, these changes often result in social and sibling relationships (Garrido et al., 2011). Although a child may be adopted, this does not mean that these irregularities disappear but rather that foster youth may display poorer emotional adjustment than children who have not been in the foster care system.

Placement Disruptions and Problem Behaviors

Placement instability is a significant factor when it comes to children's behavior and performance in various settings. The greater the number of placements the higher risk of behaviors the child may display. Although many might think the transitions typically stop once the child is placed with a resource family, previously known as a foster or foster/adoption family, this is slightly skewed. Research found "children with 5 or fewer problem behaviors were at low risk for disruption but their risk increased 10% for each additional behavior" (Fisher et al., 2011). Not only did behavioral problems develop from multiple placements, but they were also the cause of placements amongst foster families. These behaviors are typically seen within the first three months of placement (Fisher et al., 2011). Overall, research has concluded preventing and ultimately eliminating such disruptions could contribute permanent placement, more sensitive said as forever homes. (Fisher et al., 2011).

This review was done to identify the trauma that is experienced by these children and emphasize that foster youth have experienced this as an ongoing

process due to the many placements. The instability then emphasized the behaviors that accompany multiple placements and trauma, illustrating the correlation of behavioral, emotional, and academic difficulties that can develop. Because placement instability can lead to trauma, the study will research how the instability has affected them in their current placement.

Theoretical Orientation

A trauma-informed approach reflects adherence to six key principles rather than a prescribed set of practices or procedures” (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). This approach includes six principles that can be generalized to each setting including safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, voice and choice, and cultural, historical, and gender Issues” (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). A trauma-informed approach is a key approach to implement when working with foster youth who have experienced trauma because the approach “enable[s] young people to move beyond functioning that is largely the result of unconscious processes focused on basic survival” (Casey, 2012, p. 6). The approach overall “services free young people to learn, develop, and build relationships with supportive and caring adults” (Casey, 2012, p. 6). The approach integrates strength-based approaches to realize, recognize, and respond to trauma and circumstances, while seeking to resist re-traumatization. Because of this, this approach, or framework, will be integrated in

the discussion of the research findings to better illustrate the effects of trauma and realistic behavioral responses.

Potential Contribution of Study to Micro and/or Macro Social Work Practice

Research regarding multiple placements amongst foster youth contribute to social work practice because the research provided social workers with knowledge of the emotional interruptions youth face with each transition made. The research allowed the field of social work to obtain a better understanding of how to better assist foster youth and develop highlight existing or new interventions to integrate in care. Due to the post positivist approach used for this research focus, the field of social work could better understand various dynamics when discussing multiple placements. Research on multiple placement instability provided an open exploration of various scenarios that many children encounter, taking into consideration each experience is different. The vast study of the research allowed workers to grasp the understanding there is never a simple, one method response or intervention but there can be some commonalities found that may assist in developing various tool boxes of interventions.

Summary

Chapter one discussed the research topic and reviewed studies that highlighted important findings of foster youth who are affected by trauma inflicted by multiple placements/instability. The chapter also identified a theory to conceptualize effects of trauma throughout the study.

CHAPTER TWO

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Chapter two discusses the engagement phase and entities when taking a post-positivist approach. This chapter also discusses the study site, describing the location of where the study took place. This chapter identifies various issues such as diversity, ethical, and political addressed in self-preparation. Lastly, chapter two briefly discuss the role of technology throughout the engagement phase incorporating the need to record interviews.

Research Site

The study site was at a Foster Family Agency (FFA) in Southern California. The FFA's mission is to provide unconditional care while helping children and families through the most difficult times of their lives. Although the FFA serves various populations because of numerous locations, the research study was conducted in the Southern California area. The FFA overall serves a diverse community. Families and children are from various races, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and age. Diversity is not only among the families seeking to foster/adopt, but are also diverse regarding race among the children from various counties. Socioeconomic status of children are typically of a lower status prior to placement. The FFA overall provides a wide range of continuum of care for both children and adults during the most difficult times of their lives. The FFA can

provides unconditional care that continues to address the family's needs through the work of their diverse team. The FFA's team is composed of social workers, counselors, therapists, psychiatrists, and advocates that hold a significant amount of experience in working with foster youth. Although there are many workers, the study focused on obtaining data from social workers to aim towards gaining social work implications.

Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

The gatekeeper in this study was the FFA director and the FFA supervisor of the Placement Program. To obtain the gatekeepers' interest, the researcher integrated challenges of instability during a Care Group presentation. The training was presented with major points on a PowerPoint that which highlighted challenges of instability from both a research perspective and a personal perspective. The PowerPoint also highlighted some the need to encourage further exploration interventions that can assist both the FFA and Resource Families with providing unconditional care.

To gain and maintain interest, it is crucial to provide as much information as possible while encouraging feedback. Ultimately, this meant the gatekeepers were informed of progress of the research and were asked questions to ensure their interests and suggestions are considered. This was done by providing them with a generalized update during supervision and discussing challenges with training preparation.

Self-Preparation

Self-preparation consisted of the researcher completing literature reviews regarding different aspects of trauma, how trauma affects foster youth, how placement instability leads to or intensifies further trauma, and what types of behaviors are common responses to trauma of instability. The key to self-preparation was to fully understand the dynamics of the study. Doing this allowed the researcher to understand how to address conflicts or new areas of direction.

In self-preparation, it was also crucial for the researcher, to take time for self-reflection due to countertransference. Because the researcher encountered similar experiences described by workers, it was necessary to invest time in recognizing and reflecting on thoughts and feelings. To promote self-reflection and self-care, the researcher processed countertransference with gatekeepers during supervision.

Diversity Issues

Diversity issues are important when conducting a study and often arise without intent. To minimize this issue, roles were maintained throughout the time of research as to not have role confusion that may skew data. Participants and workers remained mindful of personal biases throughout the interviews and processed thoughts and emotions within individual supervision as needed.

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are an important factor when conducting a study. It is crucial that all ethical responsibilities as social workers are followed in a safe environment. To ensure ethical issues did not rise, the researcher remained transparent, open, and direct regarding the study to ensure all participants are aware of the process. Because the initial development of the study consisted of interviewing social workers, all participants were informed that all information provided would remain confidential. To maintain confidentiality, the interviewees were not referred to by name nor were clients they worked with during recording. To protect the recorded interview, the researcher transcribed and transferred data to the researcher's personal laptop with coded aliases. Once this was done, digital recording was deleted to eliminate breach of confidentiality.

Although there was much needed time to conduct and successfully obtain beneficial data, the engagement phase was considered carefully as to not create further ethical issues by prolonging engagement. The researcher eliminated this as dates and times were coordinated with participants individually to complete interview without further questioning. All participants were receptive of the process. All interviews were conducted within days of one another in which all signed an informed consent.

Political Issues

Political issues could have been encountered would have been perhaps a power struggle between the researcher and gatekeepers when working to

facilitate interviews and developing interview material. However, this did not at all occur as the researcher and gatekeepers maintained open, respectful, and direct communication one another. For open and direct communication to be monitored, “supervision” meetings occurred weekly to address issues, concerns, and/or development of interests to implement in the research process. Gatekeepers remained informed about the progress but not the content collected throughout the interviews. Providing content can encourage political issues and restructure efforts of the research study.

The Role of Technology in Engagement

The role of technology played a significant role within the research study conducted. Technology was used to collect literature to complete literature reviews about that focus on instability, trauma, foster youth, and functional consequences. Aside from literature gathering via internet, technology was also used to record interviews to preserve the authenticity of information provided.

Summary

Chapter two discussed engagement while identifying various issues that could have been encountered when conducting the research study. These issues could have occurred at different levels; therefore, it was crucial that the researcher remained conscious of these dynamics and implemented thoughtful interventions to best minimize any political, ethical, and/or diversity issues to occur.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

Throughout the implementation section of research, it was necessary to carry out data gathering whether it was by qualitative or quantitative data. Qualitative data refers to the formation of words and sentences whereas quantitative data refers to gathering numeric responses. Because the research topic focused on the impact trauma from placement instability among foster youth, qualitative data gathering was most appropriate when using the post positivist approach. The following chapter discusses in further detail how data was gathered, data collection efforts, and data recording methods.

Study Participants

Six social workers participated in this study. All social workers were open, honest, and direct when discussing experiences and implications. This was validated as this form of communication is integrated into the agency's culture and New Employee Orientation (NEO). All social workers who work for the Foster Family Agency are Master's level Social Workers (MSW) and/or are Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW). All social workers have worked for the agency for at least one year but have more than two years of experience in the field of social work. Through these highly knowledgeable staff members, the researcher

of this study obtained firsthand information and knowledge that contributed to better understanding developed trauma from placement instability through the perspective of social workers.

Table 1 below provides specific demographic information of the participants. Most participants were married, they were all between the ages of 25 and 34, and half were White American (50%) followed by Latino American (33%) and Other (17%).

Table 1. Sample Demographics (N=6)

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Marital Status:		
Married	5	83.3%
Single	1	16.6%
Age:		
18-24	0	0%
25-29	4	66.7%
30-34	2	33.3%
35-39	0	0%
40-45	0	0%
Race/Ethnicity:		
White American	3	50%
African American	0	0%
Latino American	2	33.3%
Other	1	16.6%
Highest Level of Education:		
Some College	0	0%
Bachelor's Degree	6	100%
Master's Degree	6	100%

Selection of Participants

The purposive sampling was used, specifically typical case sampling, in this qualitative research study. Typical case sampling is the process of selecting cases/participants for research that are not atypical or deviant from the norm. This was most appropriate because of the researcher's efforts to identify and gather data to better identify what are typical behaviors and responses to trauma of instability among foster children from a social worker's perspective. This was implemented by initially asking 20 social workers to participate in the study who have worked with children who have experienced placement instability at some point in their life. A flyer was emailed to staff working in the Southern California area requesting social workers to participate. The flyer was distributed via email by the gatekeeper to encourage participation. Participants received a \$10 Starbucks gift card for participation. Due to shifts to the agency and reevaluation of researcher's capabilities, the requested number of participants was reduced to six participants.

Data Gathering

The post positivist approach to qualitative data engaged people in conversation via interviews, observing people interacting with one another, and studying documents and social artifacts. Qualitative data allowed research study to explore multiple placements and gather data such as: effects of trauma due to instability, common behaviors that result from trauma, triggers that may cause such behaviors, and possible interventions and methods to minimize or address

behaviors that can be implemented by social workers and resource families. To gather this specified data, open-ended questions were asked. Refer to appendix for interview questions asked.

Conducting interviews were the main source of obtaining data for the research study. Data was gathered by voice recording the interview which was later transcribed into a word document. Prior to recording, each participant read and signed an informed consent form, ensuring privacy, safety, and confidentiality. The preparation for the interviews involved the interviewee being aware of the time frame of the study and the phases throughout the interview process such as engagement, development of focus, maintaining focus, and termination.

Due to youth being a vulnerable population, it was most appropriate to conduct the study amongst social workers who maintain first-hand experience with the research topic of interest. The interviews consisted of descriptive, structural and contrast questions as noted above.

Descriptive questions can be defined as overarching questions that can also be extremely focused. The descriptive questions used in the interview process will be: How many transitions did the child experience prior to placement with current foster/adopt parent? What were some behaviors the child displayed? These descriptive questions provide insight of emotions of the child.

Structured questions can be defined as inclusion, verification, or substitution frame questions. These questions expand the understanding of the

topic further than descriptive topics do. Inclusion questions focused around the topic while expanding the topic. Verification questions assess the researcher's understanding of the topic. Substitution frame questions allowed the removal of information to provide and invite the interviewee to replace the information with their understanding or even their reaction. Such understanding explored and developed questions to the interviewee such as: How did stability for x number of months help the child's behaviors (inclusion)? Since the child lived in the foster/adopt home, did the child identify the home as their new home (verification)? At the time of living in the foster/adopt home, did the child identify the foster parent as their forever parent (verification)?

Contrast questions allowed for the development of criteria for inclusion and exclusion for a category of knowledge. This can more simply be defined as set and pile sorting questions in which topics were labeled in response to the interviewee's agreement on the information of the topic. Contrast questions were carried out by asking questions such as: What was it about home that the child particularly enjoyed? Was there anything that made the child less confident in their stability, according to the child?

Phases of Data Collection

During data collection, there were phases which took place within the interviews such as: preparation, engagement, development of focus, maintaining focus, and termination. The research prepared the participant by informing them of the length of time the interview would take to maintain respect

of participants time. The recording mode was voice recording accompanied by a white noise machine powering outside of the office space. A consent to record was obtained prior to the beginning.

Engagement carried out by discussing the process and asking simple questions that engaged the participant such as question 1 and 2 listed above. Development of the focus and maintaining focus was completed with questions 3-14 to revolve around the topic of research. Termination was implemented by discussing how data will transcribed and ensuring the original file will be deleted to ensure confidentiality. Questions the participant may have had were also answered along with presentation of a gift card.

Data Recording

The structure of the interviews involved participants being aware of audio recordings and the need to maintain authenticity. Recording allowed the researcher to refer to the interviews to focus on questions, interactions, and emotions that were not necessarily recognized at the time of the interview. Hearing the recording allowed information to remain “fresh” and concrete. Again, the interviews were conducted in a private setting (office spaces utilizing white noise machines). Once the recordings were completed, data was saved on a voice recorder and were transferred and transcribed into a transcription tool.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data obtained from participants were analyzed using a bottom up approach. To complete this approach appropriately, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding was completed to better understand data obtained. Open coding was completed by transcribing all interviews using an online transcription tool. Entities within each interview were then color coded to highlight themes and subthemes. Themes and subthemes were then evaluated and connected to quotes as part of axial coding. Open coding and axial coding provided a visual to themes and outliers that proved to be relevant. Once these were linked and commonalities were clear, selective coding took place. Selective coding put open and axial coding into a narrative, integrating literature reviews. Lastly, a conditional matrix was developed to illustrate the relationship between the theoretical orientation and findings. This discussed implications to social work and how the research study can assist both social workers and resources families when caring for a foster youth who has been traumatized by instability.

Summary

Chapter three identified and discussed the entities of the implementation phase. Implementation involved information regarding the study participants, data analysis and recording, and data gathering and collection. This chapter best prepared the research to further evaluate data to best present findings and implications to field of social work.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the research study within a qualitative lens. All data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed to further identify themes and subthemes. Once themes were identified, findings related to literature reviews were identified. Lastly, integration of social work implications was discussed.

Data Analysis

Table 2 presents the themes, subthemes, and their relevant description that were identified through a thematic analysis of the data received. The data was originally transcribed, examined, and coded to identify themes and subthemes using content analysis. These themes are summarized in Table 2 and are then presented with supporting quotes.

Table 2: Themes Related to Effects of Trauma Among Foster Youth.

Themes & Subthemes	Description
1. Effects of Multiple Placement Challenges with attachment Decline in academic performance/ educational delays High anxiety.	The impact of multiple placements (MP) causes trauma, as it is a change in environment and is ultimately a sense of instability.

<p>2. Common Behavioral Reactions</p> <p>Verbal/ Non-verbal Identification of permanency</p> <p>Untrusting Care Takers</p> <p>Tantrums (kicking, screaming, throwing body on the floor, throwing toys, pinching)</p>	<p>Common behavioral reactions are common behaviors that were seen amongst foster youth in reaction to the effect of trauma.</p>
<p>3. Useful Interventions</p> <p>Teaching</p> <p>Modeling</p> <p>Self -Regulation/ Self-Awareness</p> <p>Reframing (for foster parents)</p>	<p>Interventions were identified based on what seem to assist youth and resource families through the foster/adopt process as perceived by participants of the study. Useful interventions to assist both youth and the resource family were based on common identified behavioral reactions as discussed above.</p>
<p>4. Family characteristics</p> <p>Realistic Expectations</p>	<p>Family characteristic were identified based on participants perception of what foster youth were most receptive to throughout the process. Family characteristics were also identified based on aspects that made the foster/adopt process a smoother transition.</p>

Traumatic Effects

The impact of multiple placements (MP) causes trauma, as it is a change in environment and is ultimately a sense of instability for the youth living through such life occurrences. Although each youth’s experience is unique, as prior trauma may heighten behaviors, the following are subthemes that were identified from each participant: challenges with attachment such as inappropriate boundaries, decline in academic performance/educational delays, and high

anxiety. This was observed when participants 4, 5, and 6 made the following direct statements:

“Um, there's the academic piece and there's the behavioral piece and I think most of my kiddos really, really, um, I'd say across the board all have behaviors at school to some degree, “experiencing symptoms of trauma and it's hard for them to focus in class” (Participant 4, 2018).

“School is hard. Um, I think, well in the beginning they're in such a survival mode of adjusting to a new place, adjusting to a new school, like their brains are not in a place to be able to function room or complete tasks in a school setting, “academically is challenging, but I also think socially it can be a challenge. School is a big trigger” (Participant 5, 2018).

“Most of the time it's not good. I think they have so many other things going on at school was just not a priority. Um, they're trying to figure out, you know, who loves them, they don't care about what eight times eight is,” “and unpredictable environments, create anxiety in kids who have trauma, had high anxiety anyway when you put continuous, unpredictable environments” (Participant 6, 2018).

Common Behavioral Reactions

Through further interviews common behavioral reactions foster youth display in reaction to experienced trauma were observed. Common behavioral reactions are in response to instability such as verbal and non-verbal cues of identifying placement as “home,” untrusting care takers, and tantrums. The

following are direct quotes from participants that illustrate common behavioral reactions: “throwing toys or throwing their body on the floor and having a tantrum or running out the door”, “o, um, yeah, just kids not wanting to complete homework or being ashamed of not being able to complete homework so they would maybe not do their work or throw school work in the garbage” (Participant 3, 2018).

“Tantrums, opposition, defiance,” “I feel like my kiddos at least currently have more behaviors related to like stealing, trouble in school. Um, oppositional defiance outside of the home setting. So, school primarily. So it was a lot of throwing, hitting, pinching, falling to the floor, flailing, um, and, and, and physically sort of going after what she wanted”, “ feel like I'm the older Kiddos, it's much more of a discussion as opposed to the younger Kiddos who intended to, um, demonstrate those behaviors” (Participant 4, 2019).

Not very interested in getting to know someone new and that going to be doing that rejection stuff right from the beginning”, “specially in the younger kids, like their caregiver can't leave the room because they're so terrified that, that when they leave they're gonna leave forever like everyone else has”, “for some kids that's going to be not talking to anyone and hiding in a corner and for others that's going to be yelling and hitting and kicking people and property” (Participant 5, 2018).

“Female, like teenagers, it's internalizing behaviors. So it's the 51'50 is a psychiatric hold, it's a self-harm. Um, it's the CSEC a child exploitation

involvement. It's that kind of stuff with the boys it's more externalizing. So it's the physical aggression with peers. It's the physical pressure with adults. Um, it's running away both male and female, um, some drug use" (Participant 6, 2015).

Useful Interventions

Through interviewing participants and concluding there are significant amounts of trauma revolving around multiple placements/instability for foster youth, interventions were identified that seem to assist youth, resource families, and social workers through the permanency process. Useful interventions that can assist both youth and the resource family, based on common identified behaviors were identified in subthemes such as teaching, modeling, and self-regulation and self-awareness techniques. The following are direct quotes that highlight useful interventions: "teaching the kids like coping skills, so to help better regulate when they're having a hard time. So like teaching the kids like deep breathing, having a feelings chart and doing feelings charades and like practicing being able to label those feelings and then identify themselves" (Participant 1, 2018).

"Teaching the kids how to follow directions, like just the basics of listening. Um, and so just in my last visit last week I did, um, it, it's a game with music, so I turn music on and I get the kids to dance with me and so we go wild and resolve this energy and then I paused the music so it goes silent and so the game is that they have to dance and exert this energy however they need to be quiet to be able to listen and pause when the music stops. And so it's a way of like doing

something fun but also teaching them like about listening and following the rules” (Participant 2, 2018).

“So it could be a reframing intervention on that part. It could be a redirection for the child, it could be a, you know, not giving them attention if that's what it seems like they're seeking. It could be modeling different things for the family.” “So there's a lot of redirection, a lot of distraction, a lot of offering support ahead of time to kind of anticipating a Tantrum. So for this Kiddo, music was a huge comfort and distraction at the same time. Oh um, for some kids it is creating a sensory box or creating a coping skills box” (Participant 3, 2018).

“I usually try to calm your body down, take a deep breath, like prompting him, reminding him what to do. I'm setting a boundary and then holding them to it, not backing down. I'm setting firm boundaries if then statements explaining why she's asking him to do something” (Participant 5, 2018).

Family Characteristics

Family characteristics appeared to be a theme throughout the interviews, as social workers identified key characteristics of resource families that highlight tangible and intangible energy in a home that can assist when caring for foster youth. These characteristics were illustrated in the following direct quotes:

“getting praise and being told what they were doing well from our families versus the families that just like look at the negative a lot and you're constantly critiquing the kid. Family being flexible and open to getting new information so they can kind of tailor to what the child needs. Like tailor what they do, what the child

needs and have multiple tools in their toolbox to use and that they are open to feedback, families with a good sense of humor, um, families that have gone through some difficult times in their lives and really worked through them” (Participant 1, 2018).

“Reminding them that their trauma informed parents and they do need to parent differently. I think that's really helpful” (Participant 2, 2018).

“So I think some of it is, it depends on what it is, but reframing or that parents so sorta like, well it looks like she was taking space. That’s one of the techniques that we've taught her, is that she can be on the sidewalk and look, it looks like she's on a sidewalk right now. So sometimes it's a reframe because I think there can be some shame when someone is in the home and their child is acting up” (Participant 6, 2018).

Data Interpretation

The purpose of the study was to identify the effects of trauma from multiple placements/instability foster youth experience at a young age. Through interviews with social workers, several themes and subthemes were highlighted when considering effects and interventions that can be implemented.

All participants identified instability as having a traumatic effect on foster youth which is like findings by Connell and colleagues (2006) who identified relationship between multiple placement changes and negative developmental outcomes. Such outcomes were revealed by different behaviors youth displayed such as attachment difficulties and internalizing and externalizing behaviors

(Connell et al., 2006). This was important as it highlighted the need for stability to foster and encourage healthy brain development, social and emotional development, and self-regulation.

Through the research, youth also seemed to exhibit common behaviors in response to trauma. For example, four of the participants described common behaviors youth displayed such as tantrums that consist of yelling, screaming, throwing body on the floor, kicking, and pinching. This is important as it highlighted how instability influences foster youth as they displayed unhealthy self-regulation responses. This is not to say there may not have been a precipitating event that may have heightened behavior but rather that coping skills were not developed. Other common behaviors in response to attachment as identified by three participants are pushing care takers away or attaching to an unknown person very quickly and being defiant with rules care taker may have set. Although this theme was identified, it was also found that age played a role in common behaviors as older youth typically have more time of instability than younger children do. Older youth may have more behaviors than younger youth as the younger ones may be not display as many behaviors. This connected to Fisher et al. (2011) as they identified youth with 5 or fewer problem behaviors as having a 10% increased risk for additional behaviors. However, through interviews, participants also identified that common behavioral changes co-occurred with placement stability improved such as: verbal and non-verbal cues of feeling safe and secure with attachment, identifying resource parents as

“mom” or “dad,” ownership of material objects, intangible energy improves from both resource family and foster youth, physical developmental improvement, decrease of common behavioral reactions identified above, increased confidence, and decrease in anxiety. This was important as it validated benefits of stability for to foster healthy attachment.

Implication of Findings for Micro and/or Macro Practice

Although instability and trauma cannot be eliminated to further protect foster youth, the research study highlighted several implications for social workers and resource families to implement when caring for foster youth. Such implications are to pre-screen resource families prior to placing children in the home. This is to ensure they are proper prepared and are trained to be trauma informed care takers, as it is a necessity to understand common responses to uncontrolled traumas experienced in earlier years. Such trainings would also include integrating interventions used by social workers with families such as reframing and modeling. Reframing a family’s negative responses and pre-screening measures by social workers would allow for families to learn and develop realistic expectations to assist the family with a better understanding of the child and what they are receptive to. Interventions such as these should be highlighted to caretakers from workers to emphasize the understanding that the such interventions can aid with bonding and attachment which then “establishes a relationship which the undeveloped, unregulated brain of the child can make use of the developed, regulated brain of the adult (Sprinson and Berrick, 2010, p.

33). This is to say that youth can further develop and become self-regulated with the interaction such families can provide.

Implication of Findings for Minors

Working with foster youth can be challenging due to the levels of trauma they have experienced. Throughout the research study, this remained a focal point in efforts to identify interventions to better assist staff, youth, and families. The study implies trauma-informed care (TIC) is important to implement to best assist trauma effected youth. TIC has been proven to be useful in the past due to its ability “to stabilize the child emotionally and enhance his/her feelings of safety and control” (Alekian, et al., 2006, p. 4). This was evident through participants efforts as they taught youth how to utilize coping mechanisms. The implication for foster family agencies and families is to teach youth such coping mechanisms by implementing age appropriate tools such as: feelings charts, feelings charades, going for a walk, “time-ins” to reflect on choices and feelings, teaching how to follow rules with explanation of reasoning and consequence, and modeling of behaviors such as completing deep breathing exercise. Aside from this, such efforts of TIC “help the individual cope by deriving meaning from their subjective experience and thereby shift their perception of themselves” (Alekian, et al., 2006, p. 17).

Limitations

Despite the helpful implications for the field of social work and minors, there were significant limitations that should be acknowledged. Limitations within the study were the sample size and sampling method. Because the sample size was small based on only six participants and consisted of a convenience sample that did not reach a larger participant area, the generalizability of the data is limited. Furthermore, participants were only asked to reference children associated with the foster family agency rather than children they have worked with in the past. This means there were limits to data as each participant could only provide data on a smaller case load. This also means children who are currently in group homes are excluded, which could have contributed to gaining a better understanding of behaviors. Future research will need to expand to a larger participant area to validate new interventions to implement in concurrent planning.

Summary

Chapter four analyzed the data that was obtained throughout the research study. The chapter correlated findings to literature reviews that correlated with effects of trauma, common behaviors in response to trauma, useful interventions, and family characteristics. The chapter also discussed implications to the field of social work and limitations to the research study.

CHAPTER FIVE

TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

Introduction

Chapter five discusses termination efforts both formal and informal levels. Continuance of engagement with participants was also discussed to present findings to FFA. Communication of findings and dissemination plan was integrated within this chapter as well.

Termination of Study

Termination consisted of formal and informal levels. Formal levels of termination involved a presentation of the findings and a submission of the study to the Department of Social Work at the University of Cal State San Bernardino. Formal termination also occurred between the researcher and the participants, thanking them for their participation in the study. The formal termination for participants also permitted each participant to ask questions or make comments as desired. The research also spoke with a member of the FFA's research development team who expressed interest in reading the research study. The researcher will make efforts to further contact member once research is published as more research is needed regarding placement instability among foster youth.

Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan

Communication of findings were presented to colleagues who were involved in the study once the study is approved and published by the IRB. The presentation was done through a PowerPoint that will consist of tables and images. Presenting the findings in this manner engaged and invited viewers in better understanding effects of trauma.

Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

The relationship with the study participants will discontinue once the findings have been presented. If relationship remains ongoing, it will be due to the researcher being employed with the agency. However, engagement regarding specific participation and information shared will not be encouraged.

Summary

Chapter five discusses termination efforts with the agency to uphold ethical standards. Possible future engagements were identified and explained. Presentation of findings and publications was also discussed to ensure findings are presented accurately to members.

APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

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

Researcher(s): Savannah Perez

Proposal Title: The Effects of Placement Instability Among Youth in Foster Care

SW1880

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:

- 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)



Committee Chair Signature

6/12/2018

Date

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

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the impact of placement instability among foster youth and the benefits and challenges of current proposed solutions within the Southern California area. The study is being conducted by Savannah Jayne Perez, a MSW student under the supervision of Dr. James Simon, assistant 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 the impact of placement instability among foster youth and the benefits and challenges of current proposed solutions.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked of a few open-ended questions that pertain to understanding the impact of multiple placements. The clinicians will discuss their experiences of working with foster children who had 2 or more placements.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is completely 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 always. Although data will be recorded, the transcribed original files will be destroyed.

DURATION: It will take 30-45 minutes to complete the face to face interview.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. James Simon at (909) 537-7224 (email: james.simon@csusb.edu)

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2019.

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APPENDIX C
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT



College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

The below interview questions will be used to gather data needed for the proposed research. Questions will begin with background information followed by questions regarding common behaviors of foster youth, characteristic of fost/adopt family, and behavioral/emotional changes once the child was stable.

1. How long have you been a social worker?
2. How long have you been with the FFA?
3. From your experience, what is the average number of placements a child experienced?
4. What were common behaviors, prior to placement, of children who had more than one placement prior to being placed with FFA fost/adopt family?
5. What were common behaviors these children displayed once placed?
6. How long did these behaviors last?
7. Was the child's school performance affected, and if so how?
8. What challenging experiences did you encounter when attending home visits and how long did it last throughout the visit?
9. Were interventions incorporated to assist the child with behaviors? If so what interventions worked best?
10. When considering a placement for children, what characteristics are identified in a family to best match the child's needs?
11. How did you prepare your certified families to care for children with such challenging behaviors?
12. How often, if any, did families give a 7-day notice for children with challenging behaviors?
13. How did stability for x number of months help the child's behaviors?
14. Since the child lived in the foster/adopt home, did the child identify the home as their new home?

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If so, how long did that take?

15. What about the home did the child particularly enjoy? Was there anything that made the child less or more confident in stability, according to the child?

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