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# Factors That Contribute to Effectiveness of Foster Care Networks in Securing Permanency for Children: An Exploration of Network Participants' Perceptions in Urban and Rural Settings

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# FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EFFECTIVENESS OF

# FOSTER CARE NETWORKS IN SECURING PERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN*:*

## *AN EXPLORATION OF NETWORK PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS IN URBAN AND*

## *RURAL SETTINGS*


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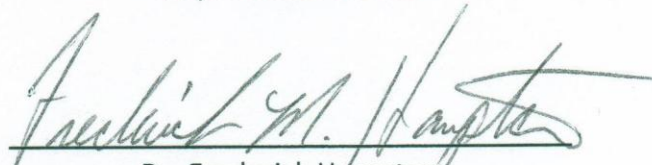
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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wonderful wife, Judy, who has encouraged and supported my

educational pursuit for that past 30 years; and has had an active role in successful

completion of this dissertation research project.

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# FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EFFECTIVENESS OF FOSTER CARE NETWORKS IN SECURING PAERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN*: AN EXPLORATION OF NETWORK PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS IN URBAN AND RURAL SETTINGS*

## REZA M. KHORAMSHAHI

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify possible factors that may contribute to the variations in effectiveness of foster care networks in a rural and an urban Ohio county. The effectiveness of the networks was assessed based on the success of the foster care networks to provide permanency for children who are placed in out-of-home care. For the purpose of this study the foster care network organizations in each county included the child welfare agencies, the juvenile courts, private foster care agencies and foster families.

The child welfare agencies in each of Ohio counties operate independently, and their success in securing permanency for foster children varies for each county. This variation is particularly evident when comparing the Ohio's rural and urban counties. The available descriptive data indicates that the foster care networks in Ohio's smaller rural counties are on average more successful in securing permanency for children than the larger urban counties. The existence of such variations was confirmed through comparison of existing descriptive data for 40 counties (20 rural and 20 urban) for the child permanency indicators.

Since this researcher could not find information in the existing literature to explain these variations, this study was designed to identify the possible factors that may be responsible for such variations through exploring the perceptions of individuals who are closely connected with the foster care networks. This study explored the perceptions of

30 foster care network stakeholders through in-depth field interviews. The individuals interviewed for this study (15 from each of the urban and rural counties selected for this study) included staff from the child welfare agencies, the juvenile courts, private foster care agencies, as well as the foster families. The staff members from various levels of each organization were interviewed, which included child welfare agency directors, juvenile court judges, private foster care agency directors, as well as supervisors and direct care staff from each organization.

The data obtained from the in-depth field interviews were analyzed through the grounded theory research method. This research resulted in several new findings that may explain variations for the rural versus urban county foster care network effectiveness in securing permanency for children, as well as improving the overall effectiveness of foster care networks. This study also confirmed the results of prior network research, and found information that are suggestive of possible theories, which can be formulated and tested. Finally, this study provided key recommendations for practitioners that would enhance the success of foster care networks in securing permanency for children.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### *Background*

The purpose of this research was to explore the factors that may explain the variations in the effectiveness of foster care networks in securing permanency for children in an urban county and a rural county in Ohio. The possible factors for variations between the foster care networks in these counties were explored based on perceptions of 30 stakeholders who are associated with these networks and were interviewed for this study.

Ohio is one of the strongest home rule states and uses county government to address local social service needs. Each of the 88 Ohio counties has its own independently operated child welfare agency, which is responsible for providing permanency for children in foster care. As a result the foster care networks in each county operate differently, and their performance in securing permanency for foster children varies from county to county.

This variation is particularly evident between Ohio's rural and urban counties. The available descriptive data suggests that the foster care networks in Ohio's smaller rural counties are on average more successful in securing permanency for children than the networks in larger urban counties. This fact was established by comparing the

descriptive data for 40 counties (20 rural and 20 urban) based on the following permanency indicators: 1) the number of days children remain in placement after being removed from home; 2) the number of days it takes for adoption finalization after permanent custody is granted to the child welfare agency; and 3) the percentage of children who are reunified with their families in less than 12 months after removal from home.  Data for the above indicators was obtained from the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) for the periods of 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011, and from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) for the periods of 2008, 2009 and 2010.  Results are outlined in detail in chapter two.

The network and foster care literature does not include information that would explain variations in effectiveness of foster care networks in urban and rural counties.  To identify the potential factors that may be responsible for the variations in success of foster care networks in securing permanency for children in rural and urban counties, the foster care networks from one urban county and one rural county were selected for an in-depth study.  This study explored perceptions of 15 stakeholders from foster care networks in each of the counties (total of 30 individuals) who were interviewed for this study.  These individuals included staff from the child welfare agencies, the juvenile courts, private foster care agencies, as well as the foster families.

As the result of exposure to substantial input from the key stakeholders in the two foster care networks, as well as the related network and foster care literature, this research explored not only the differences between the foster care networks, but also contributed to understanding of the relationships between network organizations in general, as well as the wide-ranging issues related to the field.  This research resulted in several new

findings, confirmation of previous research results, information that are suggestive of possible theories that can be formulated and tested, and key recommendations for practitioners that are detailed in chapters four and five.  The following diagram summarizes the steps for the dissertation research process.

**Research Roadmap**

| Permanency for foster children is one of the most problematic areas of child welfare in the U.S. | Data from various sources, including the ODJFS and PCSAO support this fact | 1. Financial Resources 2. Cohesiveness 3. Competency 4. Community/ Citizen Support | Questionnaire was developed to assess the participants' perceptions in regards to the intervening variables | 30 network stakeholders (15 from the urban and 15 from the rural county) participated in the study | Strauss and Corbin Method: Coding Themes Findings | New Findings: 1. Proactive approach 2 Programs 3. Comm. Support 4. Discretionary Powers 5. Knowledge / commitment 6. Foster family demographics | Suggestions for theory development: 1. Foster family demographics 2. Citizen participation 3. Discretionary powers |

| Study of Foster Care Networks' Effectiveness in Securing Permanency for Children | There are Urban V. Rural County Variations in Ohio for Foster Care Network Effectiveness | Explore the Factors Responsible for these Variations | Design a Qualitative Study Using Grounded Theory Approach | Conduct In-depth Interviews with 30 Network Stakeholders | Data Analysis | Identify the Factors (Findings) | Provide Recommendat-ions for Theory and Practice |

| Study of the permanency (dependent variable) is significant, since the lack of permanency results in major social problems | An urban and a rural county (independent variables) were selected for an in-depth study of foster care networks | The factors (intervening variables) were selected as the result of literature review and experience | Grounded theory method was ideal for this research, which was designed to help develop theories for variations in network effectiveness | Conducted field interviews with participants from various levels of network organizations | The analysis of data obtained through field interviews resulted in new findings and confirmation of prior findings | Confirmed Prior Findings: 1. Financial Resources 2. Cohesion 3. Kinship Care | Recommendations: 1. Proactive approach 2. Support for kinship 3. Involvement of foster families 4. Citizen inclusion 5. Standard processes 6. Access to programs |

**Figure 1. Research Roadmap;** adapted from Gomez and Teuteberg (2010).

### *Purpose of the Study*

Caring for children in foster care is a significant challenge for human services agencies which costs U.S. taxpayers more than 12 billion dollars annually (Piccola & Crampton, 2009).  According to the results of multiple Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR), the most problematic area of foster care components is securing permanent placements for foster children, which results in various social, physical and mental health challenges for these children all throughout adulthood (CFSR).

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The current state of affairs in the foster care system appears to be the result of decades of 'sector failures' (Abbott, 1938; Lenz-Rashid, 2005) and 'public value failures' (Bozeman, 2007; Bremner, 1974) in our society. Moving the responsibility of caring for these children from one sector (government, community or relatives) to another without a comprehensive and consistent plan has been occurring throughout our history. Literature suggests that a holistic and comprehensive approach must be undertaken to address multiple aspects of this complex societal problem (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). The community or the government alone cannot provide all of the resources needed to effectively address the permanency needs of children placed in out-of-home care. Tackling such a complex "wicked" social problem requires creative public and private partnerships and cross-sector collaborations or networks (Goldsmith & Eggers 2004; Selsky & Parker 2005).

This study built upon previous work on network effectiveness by researchers in this field including Provan & Milward (1995, 2001) and Provan & Kenis (2008) to further identify factors that influence network effectiveness. The results of this study may help enhance the effectiveness of foster care networks and guide practitioners and policy makers towards the improvement of permanency for children. This study also includes information that is suggestive of possible theories, which can be formulated and tested.

*Nature of the Problem*

Information on children who experience long stays in foster care, as well as those who successfully achieve permanency, supports that permanency is a complex and pervasive area of child welfare system that affects and is affected by a multitude of variables at the

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practice, organizational, and systems levels.  Data from the Adoption and Foster Care

Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS, 2012) indicates that there were more than

400,540 children and youth in foster care nationally as of September 30, 2011, with the

average length of stay of approximately 24 months.  However, 31 percent of the children

have been in out-of-home placement for more than 24 months; with some children (10%)

in placement for five years or longer.  AFCARS data indicates that once children remain

in foster care for three years or longer, they tend to diverge from the universe of all

children in foster care in significant ways.  Approximately 23 percent of children who

had been in foster care for three years or more had experienced an average of nearly six

placement settings (disruptions); almost double that of the universe of children in care.

After the removal of children from home, biological/custodial patents are given the

Although the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (a federal law

enacted November 19, 1997) mandated shorter time frames for making permanency plans

and decisions, and to facilitate adoption process, for many children foster care continues

to be a significant portion of their life experiences (Steinberg, 2007).  Children placed in

foster care are removed from their homes as the result of abuse, neglect and other safety

issues.  The purpose of the foster care system is to provide a temporary safe environment

for the children until they are reunified with their biological/custodial families or placed

in other permanent settings.  The problem is that many of these children linger in care for

long periods of time before being placed or aging out of foster care.

After the removal of children from home, biological/custodial patents are given the

opportunity to address the issues which led to removal of the children and become

reunified with them.  Families are provided with a plan to follow and are given up to one

year to complete their plans (i.e., drug treatment, parenting education, anger

management).  If families do not complete their plans within the specified time period, the county child welfare system can apply for permanent custody of the children and place the children for adoption.  A major problem in this process is that some families do not successfully complete their plans and use the legal system to buy more time.  Also, as a result of heavy caseloads and inadequate resources it may take up to five years or even longer to place the children for adoption.  In the meantime, children will suffer from lack of permanency and as they get older and remain in foster care longer their chances for adoption and permanency decreases.

Children in foster care encounter a higher level of emotional problems and will have difficulty adjusting as adults (Roman & Wolfe, 1995; Lenz-Rashid, 2005).  The results are even more troublesome if children stay in foster care for longer periods of time. Children who remain in foster care for longer periods of time suffer negative consequences more severely than their counterparts who are not in the foster care system for lengthy periods.  Examples of these negative consequences include higher incidences of behavioral and mental health problems, educational failures, homelessness, and juvenile delinquency.  This problem is compounded by the fact that numerous barriers exist in the way of achieving permanency for foster children (Macomber, J. E., Scarcella, C. A., Zielewski, E. H., & Green, R., 2004; the U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2002).  The findings from these sources are also supported by the findings from multiple rounds of Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) which concluded that most problematic area of foster care was securing permanent placements for foster children (CFSR).

### *Significance of the Study*

For complex social problems, there are no easy solutions and they cannot be addressed through conventional solution processes. Typically social problems occur within given structural contexts of historical periods, technological stage of development, and the socioeconomic system (Russell, 2006), and the issue of securing permanency for our foster children is no exception since this problem has existed throughout the history of the United States in one form or another. Such social problems are known as "wicked" problems, where each attempt to create solutions changes the understanding of the problem. "Wicked" problems cannot be solved through traditional means and methods since the problem definition evolves as new possible solutions are proposed, and solving such problems requires expertise, political will, and collaboration amongst the diverse array of stakeholders (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

In regards to the issue of permanency for foster children we are confronted with a "wicked" problem, which requires a holistic approach in addressing multiple aspects of the problem in a comprehensive manner through an effective foster care network. The focus of this study was to identify potential factors that may contribute to the effectiveness of foster care networks, and to help develop possible theories and recommendations which would enhance the networks' success in securing permanency for children.

## *Research Questions*

The research questions for this study were:

1. Do perceptions about the availability of adequate financial resources as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

2. Do perceptions about network cohesiveness as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

3.  Do perceptions about community support as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

4. Do perceptions about the stakeholder knowledge/competency as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

5. Do perceptions about foster parent demographic characteristics as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

6. What other factors are perceived as significant in determining foster care network effectiveness among urban and rural county stakeholders?

## *Limitations of the Study*

Whereas this researcher believes that the research results contributed to the literature in the field of urban studies and public affairs, both in the areas of research and practice, there are a number of limitations associated with this research.  First, the data for this study was collected from only one rural and one urban county which may have limited

the findings to the foster care networks in the two counties (limited the generalizability).

Second, this research explored major components associated with the foster care networks (child welfare agencies, juvenile courts, foster care/adoption agencies and foster families. There are, however other organizations (i.e., schools, neighborhood collaboratives) which were identified during the research process as important network components, and may shed additional light on the these variations. Third, the selection of the counties for this study was not random. Although the counties fit the larger picture and the trend in terms of their effectiveness in securing permanency for foster children (rural counties are on average more successful in securing permanency for children in a timely manner), a primary reason for selection of these counties was the convenience of data collection.

## *Definition of Key Terms*

*Network:* A group of organizations working together to accomplish a goal. It is also referred to as cross-sector collaborations. The group of organizations forming a foster care network (for the purpose of this study) includes the child welfare agency, the juvenile court, private foster care agency and foster families.

*Sector Failure:* Inability of a single sector of the society (government, community, family) to address a complex social problem, such as permanency for foster children.

*Public Value Failure:* Failure of the society to solve important social problems due to competing causes and interests, where the causes and interests with stronger financial and political support prevail.

*Wicked Problem:* Typically refers to complex social problems which cannot be resolved through conventional channels. These problems have roots in other problems and can lead to further complex problems if not addressed in a holistic manner.

*Permanency:* Refers to securing permanent living arrangement for children in foster care. This usually includes reunification with their biological/custodial families, adoptions, kinship support. When the above options are not available, the number of moves from family to family (disruptions) should be limited.

*Grounded Theory:* Is an approach to conducting qualitative research through in-depth field interviews. It is a methodology of developing inductive theories that are grounded in methodically gathered and analyzed data, which focuses on generating theory from the study. This approach is effective for gaining insight about a social problem and the explicit attempt to generate theories on how to solve the problem.

*Urban County:* The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) identifies any county that is designated as part of a Metropolitan Area (MAs) as an urban county.

*Rural County:* The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) identifies any county that is not designated as part of a Metropolitan Area (MAs) as a rural county. There is no federal government definition for rural and urban, and government agencies use different definition based on their objectives and to determine funding eligibility. This researcher has utilized the OMB definition, since it was relevant to the data already available.

# CHAPTER 2

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### *Introduction*

The related literature reviewed for this study include those in the areas of history of

foster care in the United States, nature of the problem, sector failures, public value

failures, role of the networks, network effectiveness, financial resources, network

cohesiveness, organizational effectiveness, community/citizen participation and support,

and urban vs. rural county variations.


### *History of Foster Care in the United States*

A review of the history of childcare in the United States, particularly for foster

children, demonstrates the lack of a just and equitable approach and low level of priority

in addressing the needs of these most vulnerable citizens.  Moving the responsibility of

caring for these children from one sector to another, without a comprehensive and

consistent plan is seen throughout our history.  The communities in the United States

were formed long before governments, and at some point almost all political and social

issues were handled at the community level.  Caring for children placed in out-of-home

care and preparing them for adulthood was no exception.  This task was handled by

extended families, settlement houses and religious organizations.  Due to the growth and complexity of the problem and inability of communities to effectively care for these children, the responsibility for care of the children was taken over by various government agencies, and eventually the third party providers such as the growing number of non-profit agencies.

During the **colonial times** children who were placed in out-of-home care were virtually treated as slaves.  They were at the mercy of the "masters" who cared for them (Ashby, 1997).  Until nearly 150 years ago, families who could not raise their own children relied for help on extended family members, charity from religious organizations, or orphanages. Many older children were apprenticed to tradesmen as a means of preparing them for independent living.  State-supported foster care in the United States grew in the 19th century from social welfare programs that sent children to farm families in the Midwest.  In 1863, the Massachusetts State Board of Charities approved funding for state-supported foster homes, by reimbursing foster families a weekly stipend of $2.00 to care for children in need of out-of-home care.

During the colonial times children were subjected to the laws of United Kingdom, including the "Poor Law" that authorized removal of children from their parents for being poor and because the parents were not "good breeders."  These children were known as "pauper" children, and were housed in the orphanages (Patton, N.D.)

The treatment of children in accordance to the United Kingdom's laws and traditions continued until mid 1800s.  The current form of foster care was not common until the "reform movements and children's aid societies of the mid-to late 1800s focused on the child as a member of a family group, not as an autonomous individual, and most

emphasized removing children from their own families and placing them into a different home environment" (Patton, N.D.).  The United States government's role in promoting the welfare of children began with the Whitehouse Conference on Children in 1909, and has expanded with enactment of various laws, including the Title IV of the Social Security Act in 1933 that gave rise to federal support for foster care (Yarrow, 2009).

During the **Progressive Era** there was a significant improvement in the lives of children in out of home care.  This era was one the most beneficial periods in our history for these children (Ashby, 1997).  It was realized that the relatives and the community alone could not handle the growing problem of caring for increasing numbers of children in out-of-home care.  Developments in this area during the Progressive Era also included a movement back towards orphanages and more direct public control over the fate of the children (Zmora, 1950).

Since the 1960's the federal government's involvement with the child welfare has increased, during which time the foster care system came under the supervision of governmental and private child-care agencies.   According to the information and data from U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families (2010), in the 1960s the number of children placed in foster care rose drastically partially due to increased awareness of the problem of child abuse and neglect.  The number of children in foster care grew from 100,000 in 1950 to 300,000 in 1965 (Johnston, 2012).  Also, by the late 1970s many children got lost in the foster care system because of lack of adequate effort to either reunify them with their families or arrange for adoption of these children.

A number of legislative efforts in recent years have addressed the problem of child permanency in the foster care system.  In 1980, the Child Welfare Reform Act directed child serving agencies to prevent out-of-home placements as much as possible, to increase efforts towards reunification of children with their biological families when possible or to place children in adoptive homes.  The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (a federal law enacted June 17, 1980) provided the first federal subsidies to encourage the adoption of children from the foster care system.   Adoption assistance serves to remove financial barriers for families who are interested in adoption and contributes to an increase in adoption of children with special needs.  The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 (a federal law enacted November 19, 1997) was to promote the adoption of children in foster care.  It focused more on the child protection and not as much on family preservation and reunification.  The ASFA legislation places the health and safety of out of home children first, and terminates the parental rights of abusive parents towards that end.  The legislation also provides financial incentives for states to increase the number of children adopted.  The AFSA  (1997), and later the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) act of 2001, allow for the provision of Adoption Incentive Payments to reward states that increase the number of foster children placed for adoption each year above established baselines. Funds are also provided for adoption promotion and support services and time-limited family reunification services. States have the flexibility to reinvest Adoption Incentive Payments in the manner deemed most appropriate for their child welfare systems. States most frequently use the Adoption Incentive Payments and PSSF adoption promotion and support services funds to recruit

adoptive parents, provide post-adoption services, and to hire and train additional social

workers (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2002).

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (2003) provisions include funding to

states to develop, operate, enhance, and expand community-based, prevention-focused

programs and activities designed to strengthen and support families to prevent child

abuse and neglect.  The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act

of 2008 (a federal law enacted October 7, 2008) provisions include creating an option to

provide kinship guardianship assistance payments.   These assistance payments are

similar to those currently provided to adopted children under the Adoption Assistance

Program, but include eligible children who are under the care of a legal guardian. This act

also sets a timeframe for notification of relatives after a child enters foster care, again

supporting the need to expedite permanency for children.

### *The Nature of the Problem (A Wicked Problem)*

The issue of caring for foster children is complex and requires a comprehensive

approach through collaborative governance.  Like many complex social problems, there

are no easy solutions, and it cannot be addressed through conventional solution process.

This is a wicked problem for which each attempt to create a solution changes the

understanding of the problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973).  Typically the social problems

occur within given structural contexts of historical periods, technological stages of

development, and socioeconomic system (Russell, 2006).  However, due to the "wicked"

nature of this problem it has existed throughout the history of the United States in one

form or another.  This has been primarily due to involvement of a diverse array of

stakeholders that include government, family and community, as well as complex contributing factors that include political will, financial resources and other existing priorities. A number of definitions are associated with "wicked" problems, which clearly fit the problem of caring for foster children (particularly the permanency issue). There are no final solutions for such problems, and they cannot be solved through trial and error. The problem is unique, and here are no concrete definitions and agreeable solutions. It requires expertise, political will, and collaboration amongst the diverse array of stakeholders. Moreover, in a pluralistic society there is nothing like the undisputable public good; there is no objective definition of equity; policies that respond to social problems cannot be meaningfully correct or false; and it makes no sense to talk about "optional solutions" to social problems unless severe qualifications are imposed first (Rittel & Webber, 1973). This dilemma is also characterized as a problem, which is not understood until it's resolved, the problem is unique in every situation and it's constantly changing in nature (DeGrace and Stahl, 1969).

The problems associated with foster care were identified as wicked problems at the roundtable sessions which were hosted by the Children's Home Society of America (a national association of some of the oldest child-serving agencies in the nation). Referring to the permanency issue as a wicked problem, Professor Mark Testa of UNC School of Social Work stated that "we have to recognize and be adaptable to changes and understand that our best laid plans will likely create other wicked problems that will then need to be re-solved over and over again" (White, 2013). The participants at the series of roundtables included social work leaders, child welfare administrators, researchers, philanthropists, and policymakers had gathered to debate the wicked problems of child

welfare, including how to reverse the traumatic effects of maltreatment and neglect on child well-being and how to overcome the barriers that prevent children from returning home or finding safe and permanent homes with alternative caregivers (White, 2013).

### *Sector Failures*

Throughout the U.S. History the responsibility of care for out of home children has been passed around between extended family, community and government. Each of these sectors was expected to care for the children without collaborations from the other sectors. As each would fail to adequately understand and address the unique problems of these children in the vacuum (without the cross-sector collaboration approach), their solution was to hand the problem to the other sector of the society (Abbott, 1938; Lenz-Rashid, 2005; Roman & Wolf, 1995; Zmora, 1950).

   As an example of sector failure, congressional democrats in 1990 acknowledged the "extraordinary failings" of our foster care system around the nation and proposed legislation to increase the help for families to care for their own children (Cmile, 1995). This was an acknowledgement that families by themselves (as a single sector) were not able to care for the children, and needed help from other sectors (i.e., government).

### *Public Value Failures*

The federal government and other public service agencies tend to respond better to the needs of groups of citizens with strong political connections and abundant resources. Unfortunately our children in foster care do not have such resources or abilities. Although our foster children are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society, they

are not able to organize rallies, hire lobbyists, or use their votes as leverage with the elected representatives. Although there have been some federal actions to protect the foster children and facilitate adoptions, the problems associated with our foster care system have generally remained outside of mainstream political debates, and therefore underfunded and ignored (Bozeman, 2007; Bremner, 1974; McMillen, et. al., 2003; Krebs, 2006).

Various networks that care for disadvantaged groups (i.e., mentally and physically disabled, poor, children in foster care), are negatively affected by the public value failure. When studying rural health networks, Moscovice, Christianson, & Wellever (1995) found that support for a network by our political system may depend on who the network's constituents. Certain constituents may be better politically connected and attract more funding and resources (such as senior citizen groups who are an important voter block).

It appears that the U.S. social policies in regards to dependent children's interest have taken a backseat to other social issues throughout the history, and the funding priorities for foster care continue to be ignored (Rucker, 2007). In response to the policy of placing out dependent children in 1899, Robert Hebberd, Secretary of the State Board of Charities of New York at the time warned that "….there are indifferent public officials, serving in some instances, a constituency, who have, apparently, been interested solely to save money for their localities or to rid themselves of embarrassing charges." (Bremner, 1974, pp. 171-172).

### *Role of the Networks*

The terms "networks" and "cross-sector collaborations/partnerships" have been used interchangeably in the literature (i.e., Bryson, Crosby & Stone, 2006), and for the purpose

of this study references to cross sector collaborations/partnerships have been interchanged with networks. A network is referred to a group of three or more legally autonomous organizations that work together to achieve not only their own goals, but also a collective network goal (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Networks are increasingly assumed to be both necessary and desirable as a strategy for addressing many of society's most difficult public challenges (Agranof & McGuire, 1998; Bryson & Crosby, 2005; Bryson, Crosby & Stone, 2006; Cooper, et.al., 2006). It is difficult to successfully address complex social problems without networks.

Networks are widely recognized by both scholars and practitioners as an important form of multi-organizational governance. The advantages of network coordination in both public and private sectors are considerable, and include enhanced learning, more efficient use of resources, increased capacity to plan for and address complex problems, greater competitiveness, and better services for clients (Provan & Kenis, 2008).

Following a study of a foster care system's approach and network resistance to collaborate, Krebs & Pitcoff concluded that "to change the foster care system for teens, businesses, independent programmers, foundations, community members, and others can and should play an important role in developing innovative ideas and implementing them." There is a need for a more progressive and holistic approach to public/private partnerships, because overcoming system challenges requires fresh insights (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). Tackling such tough social problems requires networks, and the community or the government alone cannot provide all the necessary solutions (Bryson & Crosby, 2005; Mandell, 2001). Therefore a network approach is necessary to address the permanency needs of children who are in the foster care system, since solving complex

problems that demand multilateral coordination, as is often the case in the public and

nonprofit sectors, requires more than just achieving the goals of individual organizations

(O'Toole 1997).

Provan & Kenis (2008) identifies three modes of network governance. 1) Participant-

Governed Networks (such as a foster care network) depend exclusively on the

involvement and commitment of the organizations that make up the network. In health

and human services, shared-governance networks are common. Only by having all

network members participate, on an equal (or adequate) basis, will participants be

committed to the goals of the network. The shared participant-governed networks are the

simplest and most common form of networks, which are governed and coordinated by the

network members themselves with no separate governance or coordination entity.

2) Lead Organization–Governed Networks are more formal and centralized, with one of

the network agencies in a lead role. The lead organization-governed networks are often

associated with instances where a core provider agency assumes the role of network

leader because of its central position in the flow of clients and resources. An example is a

hospital in a community health network. 3) Network Administrative Organization

Networks include individuals or organizations from outside of the network, which are

responsible for governance and coordination of network activities. The network

administrative organization model of governance is highly centralized, and an example of

such network is a regional economic development network (Provan & Kenis, 2008).


*Network Effectiveness*

As networks are necessary forms of response to today's "wicked problems" (O'Toole,

1997), research on the effectiveness of networks and reasons for their effectiveness or their

lack of is in the beginning stages and is ongoing. Provan & Milward (1995, 2001) and

Provan & Kenis (2008), who are currently the prominent researchers on networks and

network effectiveness, emphasize that research on network effectiveness has been lacking

and more variables' association with network effectiveness need to be explored. They along

with O'Toole (1997) state that evaluating network effectiveness is critical if we are to rely on

them to deliver needed services to community members, and if we are to treat this form of

service delivery seriously.

Provan & Milward (1995) in their study of four community mental health organizations

explored the relationship between the structure and context of mental health networks and

their effectiveness in four states. In this study, effectiveness measures were tied to "enhanced

client wellbeing" which was seen as the top priority of the mental health clients, as well as

the clients, families and case managers/therapists. Findings suggest that network

effectiveness may be explained by various structural and contextual factors (e.g., network

integration, external control, system stability and environmental resource munificence). The

research results suggest that networks are more effective when network integration is

centralized, external fiscal control by the state is non-fragmented and direct and resources are

sufficient.

Provan & Milward (1995, 2001) explored evaluation of network effectiveness and the

primary problems most scholars encounter in evaluating network effectiveness. Networks

are complex and network evaluation is difficult because 1) networks utilize multiple agencies

to produce one or more pieces of a single service, i.e., the joint-production problem, making

it more complex than the evaluation of a single organization; and 2) networks have multiple

types of clients due to their multiple organizations. Therefore it may be more difficult to

satisfy the multiple clients of a network, and at times a network is more effective for clients

of some organizations within the network than clients from other organizations that make up the network.

Provan & Sebastian (1998) also used client outcomes as their measure of network effectiveness, by exploring the relationship between network effectiveness and inter-organizational ties among cliques of provider agencies or at the sub-network level. This was in contrast to Provan & Milward's (1995) work which focused on the relationship between network effectiveness and integration across full networks. Their findings suggest that networks are more effective with regard to client outcomes if integration occurs at the clique, or sub-network, level instead of among the full network. Furthermore, networks, involving health and human services agencies (i.e., foster care networks), will be more effective in achieving client outcomes if clique integration involves multiple and overlapping links at the client level.

Provan & Milward (2001) introduced three levels of analysis by which to measure network effectiveness (community, network, and organization/participant levels). The study suggests that effectiveness at one level is contingent on the effectiveness of other levels. The authors caution that effectiveness at one level does not always lead to effectiveness at other levels, particularly for the participant/organization level. The results of study indicate that successful networks are likely to be successful at all three levels (community, network, and organization/participant).

Weech-Maldonado, Beson, & Gamm (2003) introduce a "stakeholder accountability approach" to measuring network effectiveness. The stakeholder accountability approach presumes that with each level of analysis (community, network, organizational/participant) there are different effectiveness criteria reflecting the needs of the various stakeholders. They use this approach to evaluate the effectiveness of community health partnerships (CHPs) associated with Community Care Networks which is a nationwide foundation initiative. The

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study findings suggest effectiveness should be achieved on multiple levels for CHPs to be successful.

A great majority of the research on network effectiveness is around health networks, including mental health, rural health and general public health. This study of foster care network effectiveness will complement the existing body of knowledge in this area.

### *Financial Resources*

Provan and Millward (1995) conclude that financial resources played an important part in effectiveness of a mental health network (City of Providence, RI) that was part of their study. They also state in the conclusion of their study that "through the power of funding, states can play an important role in the organization of community-based health and human services."

Funding and financial resources have also been mentioned as a significant factor to network effectiveness by Moscovice et al. (1996), noting that networks need to be able to provide product lines to provide ongoing sources of revenue to be effective. Since the foster care networks are not conducive for selling products, then the federal, state and local governments; as well as the community needs to ensure availability of financial resources for effective operation of our foster care networks.

### *Network Cohesiveness*

Milward & Provan (1995) and Provan & Sebastian (1998) emphasize the importance of network integration among mental health networks they studied. In their study, they look at integration through examining interconnectedness among organizations within the mental health networks and the degree of centrally controlled and integrated agencies. Although

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they do not study the relationship there is an assumption that there is a positive relationship between degree of integration and network effectiveness.

In a study of rural health networks, Moscovice, Christianson, & Wellever (1995) also view integration between network organizations as beneficial to the success and effectiveness of the networks. They define integration based on how the independent organizations within a network function as a single unit through shared decision making, the contribution of resources, and sacrifice of organizational autonomy.

Trust amongst organizations, which is another indicator of network cohesiveness, is identified by Provan & Kenis (2008) as an important factor in effectiveness of shared participant-governed networks (such as a foster care network). Shared participant-governed networks are governed by the network member organizations themselves, which can be accomplished either formally (i.e., regular meetings) or more informally through routine and uncoordinated activities of organizations/individuals who have a stake in the success of the network. These networks' success depends on the involvement and commitment of its stakeholders (Provan & Kenis, 2008).

Provan & Milward's (1995) work focused on the relationship between network effectiveness and integration across full networks. Their findings suggest that networks are more effective with regard to client outcomes if integration occurs at the clique, or sub-network, level instead of among the full network. This can be seen in the informal relationships that exist in the rural county which is selected for this study. Furthermore, networks, involving health and human services agencies (i.e., foster care networks), are more effective in achieving client outcomes if "clique integration" involves multiple and overlapping links at the client level. This appears to work better in smaller networks like the

rural county studied for this research project, where the size of the network, stakeholders who

know one another and the informal nature of relationships allow for such cliques.


### *Community/Citizen Participation and Support*

Community participation and citizen involvement may be defined as the process by

which members of a community, either individually or collectively develop a capability

to assess and address the community needs and problems (Zakus & Lysack, 1998). As

the result of community or public participation, added resources can be brought into the

system, which include greater access to fundraising opportunities and availability of

volunteers. The services are also delivered more appropriately (based on the unique

needs and culture of each community), when the community is provided with greater

control. Citizen involvement also reduces the red tape and level of formal relationships

(in the interest of more informal relationships) between the community and agency

officials (Zakus & Lysack, 1998). This can also result in increased network

cohesiveness.

We can also see the impact of community/citizen participation in the roles settlement

workers played in Chicago communities in early 1900s towards the betterment of their

communities (Stivers, 2000). The advocacy by the community settlement workers to

address community problems is a good example of the role of community/citizens in a

network that addresses social problems. "The settlement workers wanted to improve the

conditions of poor people's lives by getting governments to put in place new services and

programs….. in a manner that would rouse public opinion and generate demand for

improvements in the lives of city residents" (Stivers, 2000, p. 96). Such community/

citizen participation and advocacy for our foster children is much needed as a component

of our foster care network to achieve permanency and improve the quality of life for our children.

There is significant participation by citizens to address social problems in some communities, while completely absent in others.  Research suggests that citizens want to make a difference in their communities, but may not know how to participate or there are barriers to participation (Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999).  King & Stivers also found that administrators, activists, and citizens alike, agreed that participation is necessary and desirable, but the main problem is the way it is currently practiced and framed, which does not work (King & Stivers, 1998).  "Administrators recognize the need for participation, but they cannot find ways to fit the public into decision-making processes. Citizens believe that greater participation is needed, but they are rendered cynical or apathetic by vacuous or false efforts to stimulate participation that ask for, yet discount, public input" (King & Stivers, 1998, P.319).  This research looked at the role and level of citizen participation as perceived by research participants in each county, and its importance in addressing the effectiveness of foster care networks. Since the foster care networks are complex, it would be particularly ideal for a significant level of community/citizen participation, which will result in harnessing the complexities of these networks through increasing interaction within the networks and increasing diversity and creativity (Wagenaar, 2007).

### *Organizational Effectiveness*

If we are to understand and measure effectiveness of a foster care network, it is critical that we also measure the level of competency of individual organizations/stakeholders that make up the network.  One of the primary problems associated with measuring network

effectiveness identified by Provan & Milward (1995, 2001) is that networks are made up of multiple organizations each of whom are responsible for one or more components of the services that is provided by the network.  Problems associated with a joint production process, multiple constituencies, competing goals and priorities of each organization can affect the level of commitment and contribution by each individual organization, therefore impacting the effectiveness of the entire network.

Since each individual organization within a network can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the entire network, we can assume that the level of competency and performance of an individual organization can affect the whole network performance.   By looking at the study of three levels of network effectiveness (community, network, and organization/participant levels) by Provan & Millward (2001), where they conclude that effectiveness at one level is contingent on the effectiveness of other levels, we can also presume that based on this interconnectivity of network components and functions at different levels, that effectiveness (competency) of individual organizations within the network can impact other organizations and therefore the network as a whole.

### *Urban Versus Rural County Variations*

Data from various sources from multiple years show that on average rural counties in Ohio have better outcomes in child permanency than the urban counties.  The following quantitative data was obtained for 40 Ohio counties from the Ohio Department of Job and Families (ODJFS) for the years 2008, 2009 and 2010; and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PSCAO) for the years 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 to establish the fact that there are variations in effectiveness of foster care networks in securing permanency for children in rural versus urban counties in Ohio.  A data comparison of 20

urban counties (10 largest and 10 smallest) and 20 rural counties (10 smallest and 10

largest) in Ohio indicates that the rural counties are on average more effective than urban

counties based on some of the child permanency indicators (for the percentage of

children reunited with their families in less than 12 months after removal from home by

8.5 percent; for the median number of days children remain in out of home placement by

21 percent; and for the median number of days for adoption finalization by 9 percent).

The data is presented in detail in the following tables:

**Table 1. Percentage of Children Reunified in Less Than 12 Months.**

| PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN REUNIFIED IN LESS THAN 12 MONTHS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Years Data Reported by ODJFS | | |
| **Rural Counties** | **2010** | **2009** | **2008** | |
| Vinton | 100 | 100 | 14.3 | |
| Noble | 90.9 | 37.5 | 100 | |
| Monroe | 100 | 80 | 75 | |
| Morgan | 100 | 100 | 50 | |
| Harrison | 100 | 85.7 | 100 | |
| Paulding | 50 | 25 | 100 | |
| Wyandot | 100 | 0 | 100 | |
| Meigs | 100 | 100 | 100 | |
| Pike | 85.7 | 62.5 | 100 | |
| Hocking | 100 | 90.9 | 87.5 | |
| Sandusky | 100 | 62.5 | 40 | |
| Marion | 88 | 58.8 | 80 | |
| Hancock | 61.5 | 66.7 | 61.5 | |
| Ross | 80.4 | 79.3 | 97 | |
| Sciotto | 93.2 | 86.1 | 81 | |
| Muskingham | 98.1 | 84.8 | 89.5 | |
| Tuscarawas | 72 | 57.1 | 53.8 | |
| Ashtabula | 84.2 | 68.9 | 65 | |
| Columbiana | 27.3 | 74.4 | 58.3 | |
| Wayne | 86.5 | 75.4 | 82 | |
| | | | | |
| **Avg./Year** | **85.89** | **73.56** | **76.74** | |
| **Avg./All Years** | | | | **78.73** |

**Table 1 - Continued**

| | Years Data Reported by ODJFS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Urban Counties** | **2010** | **2009** | **2008** | |
| Cuyahoga | 63 | 51 | 55.2 | |
| Franklin | 78.3 | 68.9 | 68.8 | |
| Hamilton | 57.6 | 65.8 | 61.2 | |
| Summit | 66 | 76.4 | 71.2 | |
| Montgomery | 74 | 65.3 | 60.2 | |
| Lucas | 55.3 | 63.9 | 56.3 | |
| Stark | 81.9 | 68 | 65.6 | |
| Butler | 71.9 | 66.7 | 71.4 | |
| Lorain | 87.1 | 81.6 | 76 | |
| Mahoning | 54.8 | 68.9 | 96 | |
| Lawrence | 42.9 | 80 | 100 | |
| Pickaway | 100 | 75 | 0 | |
| Union | 85.2 | 76.9 | 66.7 | |
| Brown | 87 | 86 | 80.8 | |
| Fulton | 100 | 66.7 | 60 | |
| Preble | 87.9 | 86.1 | 53.1 | |
| Madison | 70 | 70.8 | 71.4 | |
| Ottawa | 22.2 | 72.7 | 50 | |
| Belmont | 74.2 | 77.3 | 62 | |
| Carroll | 50 | 0 | 66.7 | |
| | | | | |
| **Avg./Year** | **70.47** | **72.24** | **68.02** | |
| **Avg./All Years** | | | | **70.24** |

**Ohio Department of Job and Families (ODJFS) Statistical and Demographic Data (2008, 2009 and 2010 data)**

**Please note that the urban counties are listed from largest to smallest, and rural counties are listed from smallest to largest.**

**Table 2. Median Number of Days Children Remain in Placement.**

| MEDIAN NUMBER OF DAYS CHILDREN REMAIN IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Years Data Reported by PCSAO | | | | | |
| **Rural Counties** | **2011** | **2009** | **2007** | **2005** | **2003** | |
| Vinton | 269 | 440 | 853 | 289 | 191 | |
| Noble | 186 | 140 | 93 | 287 | 11 | |
| Monroe | 120 | 737 | 140 | 83 | 120 | |
| Morgan | 276 | 572 | 89 | 1737 | 85 | |
| Harrison | 75 | 353 | 79 | 19 | 74 | |
| Paulding | 172 | 483 | 50 | 359 | 356 | |
| Wyandot | 343 | 838 | 384 | 400 | 738 | |
| Meigs | 23 | 67 | 76 | 254 | 32 | |
| Pike | 41 | 315 | 309 | 275 | 82 | |
| Hocking | 161 | 481 | 287 | 82 | 94 | |
| Sandusky | 172 | 394 | 574 | 467 | 108 | |
| Marion | 200 | 502 | 222 | 378 | 250 | |
| Hancock | 511 | 452 | 123 | 217 | 18 | |
| Ross | 38 | 426 | 162 | 42 | 41 | |
| Sciotto | 203 | 293 | 174 | 248 | 39 | |
| Muskingham | 84 | 308 | 95 | 201 | 187 | |
| Tuscarawas | 455 | 587 | 533 | 303 | 252 | |
| Ashtabula | 128 | 379 | 204 | 199 | 204 | |
| Columbiana | 371 | 416 | 80 | 402 | 184 | |
| Wayne | 235 | 539 | 370 | 229 | 194 | |
| | | | | | | |
| **Avg./Year** | **203.15** | **436.1** | **244.85** | **323.55** | **163** | |
| **Avg./All Years** | | | | | | **274.13** |

**Table 2 - Continued**

| Urban Counties | 2011 | 2009 | 2007 | 2005 | 2003 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Years Data Reported by PCSAO** | | | | |
| Cuyahoga | 426 | 870 | 555 | 536 | 464 | |
| Franklin | 147 | 443 | 213 | 187 | 194 | |
| Hamilton | 511 | 601 | 431 | 359 | 242 | |
| Summit | 91 | 374 | 175 | 104 | 189 | |
| Montgomery | 337 | 689 | 398 | 339 | 464 | |
| Lucas | 407 | 497 | 372 | 339 | 279 | |
| Stark | 305 | 457 | 330 | 330 | 334 | |
| Butler | 233 | 529 | 69 | 132 | 320 | |
| Lorain | 234 | 379 | 218 | 161 | 153 | |
| Mahoning | 342 | 536 | 222 | 224 | 153 | |
| Lawrence | 843 | 474 | 259 | 287 | 337 | |
| Pickaway | 655 | 338 | 74 | 291 | 91 | |
| Union | 292 | 410 | 87 | 93 | 125 | |
| Brown | 231 | 434 | 313 | 202 | 167 | |
| Fulton | 91 | 484 | 254 | 59 | 18 | |
| Preble | 326 | 599 | 398 | 304 | 302 | |
| Madison | 511 | 416 | 165 | 304 | 296 | |
| Ottawa | 615 | 638 | 321 | 136 | 312 | |
| Belmont | 290 | 505 | 181 | 288 | 320 | |
| Carroll | 680 | 878 | 331 | 266 | 113 | |
| | | | | | | |
| **Avg./Year** | **378.35** | **527.55** | **268.30** | **247.05** | **243.65** | |
| **Avg./All Years** | | | | | | **332.98** |

**Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PSCAO) (8th, 9th, 10th and 11th editions-data for the 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 reporting periods)**

**Please note that the urban counties are listed from largest to smallest, and rural counties are listed from smallest to largest.**

**The bi-annual data is reported for all of the children who are in care at the time of the report (January 1). Some children may have been in placement for multiple years at the time the report is prepared, which may result in large numbers for median number of days in placement.**

**Table 3. Median Number of Days for Adoption Finalization.**

| MEDIAN NUMBER OF DAYS FOR ADOPTION FINALIZATION FOLLOWING PERMANENT CUSTODY | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Years Data Reported by PCSAO** | | | | | |
| **Rural Counties** | **2011** | **2009** | **2007** | **2005** | **2003** | |
| Vinton | 367 | 473.5 | 380 | N/A | N/A | |
| Noble | N/A | 5 | N/A | 128 | 214 | |
| Monroe | N/A | 38.5 | N/A | 279 | N/A | |
| Morgan | N/A | 571.5 | N/A | N/A | N/A | |
| Harrison | 129 | 176.5 | N/A | 116 | N/A | |
| Paulding | N/A | 319.5 | 371 | 626 | 398 | |
| Wyandot | 115 | 923.5 | N/A | 617 | 319 | |
| Meigs | N/A | 22 | N/A | 514 | N/A | |
| Pike | 180 | 343 | 540 | 433 | 373 | |
| Hocking | 130 | 227 | 244 | 99 | 130 | |
| Sandusky | 397 | 330 | 233 | 850 | 602 | |
| Marion | 561 | 251 | 428 | 254 | 1234 | |
| Hancock | 840 | 233 | 206 | 442 | 158 | |
| Ross | 429 | 82 | 519 | 392 | 705 | |
| Sciotto | N/A | 168 | 246 | 1652 | 973 | |
| Muskingham | 99 | 210 | 336 | 253 | 77 | |
| Tuscarawas | 265 | 536 | 282 | 325 | 329 | |
| Ashtabula | 324 | 181 | 266 | 298 | 519 | |
| Columbiana | 418 | 241 | 449 | 1091 | 304 | |
| Wayne | 586 | 392 | 364 | 474 | 361 | |
| | | | | | | |
| **Avg./Year** | **288.1** | **286.2** | **358.3** | **477.3** | **406.5** | |
| **Avg./All Years** | | | | | | **363.3** |

**Table 3 - Continued**

| | Years Data Reported by PCSAO | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Urban Counties** | **2011** | **2009** | **2007** | **2005** | **2003** | |
| Cuyahoga | 653 | 533 | 737 | 545 | 517 | |
| Franklin | 230 | 172 | 180 | 216 | 523 | |
| Hamilton | 308 | 356 | 512 | 490 | 427 | |
| Summit | 336 | 346 | 399 | 472 | 586 | |
| Montgomery | 424 | 385 | 318 | 353 | 460 | |
| Lucas | 296 | 357 | 371 | 408 | 299 | |
| Stark | 375 | 154 | 419 | 522 | 417 | |
| Butler | 514 | 191 | 372 | 412 | 666 | |
| Lorain | 192 | 313 | 229 | 253 | 346 | |
| Mahoning | 519 | 329 | 357 | 436 | 657 | |
| Lawrence | 616 | 328 | 329 | 938 | 1178 | |
| Pickaway | 629 | 117 | 40 | 379 | 595 | |
| Union | 313 | 130 | N/A | 295 | 1118 | |
| Brown | 223 | 180 | 565 | 237 | 425 | |
| Fulton | 344 | 378 | 207 | 270 | 337 | |
| Preble | 545 | 322 | 277 | 368 | 213 | |
| Madison | 425 | 230 | 675 | 477 | 116 | |
| Ottawa | N/A | 363 | 188 | N/A | N/A | |
| Belmont | 337 | 350 | 133 | 437 | 196 | |
| Carroll | 207 | 824 | 483 | 479 | 260 | |
| | | | | | | |
| **Avg./Year** | **394.52** | **317.90** | **355.64** | **420.91** | **491.46** | |
| **Avg./All Years** | | | | | | **396.08** |

**Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PSCAO) (8th, 9th, 10th and 11th editions-data for the 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 reporting periods)**

**Please note that the urban counties are listed from largest to smallest, and rural counties are listed from smallest to largest.**

In addition to the urban and rural characteristics of the counties, according to the

above data the size of the counties also appear to be determining factors in effectiveness

of foster care networks. The foster care networks in smallest urban counties are on

average more effective than the networks in largest urban counties in securing

permanency.  Similarly the networks in smallest rural counties are on average more effective than the networks in largest rural counties in this regard.  This fact supports Provan & Kenis (2008) study of the governance modes of the networks, which suggest that as the networks grow larger, that participatory mode of governance (which is associated with governance of  foster care networks) may not be conducive and we may have to move towards a more centralized governance form (i.e., lead organization) Provan & Kenis, 2008).  These modes of governance are described in chapter two.

A recent study of outcomes associated with the Families and Systems Teams (FAST) Project, a state-wide funding stream to address the significant behavioral healthcare needs of children and adolescents, concludes that on average rural Ohio counties demonstrated better results on most of the indicators than urban counties (Gavazzi, et.al, 2011).  Data from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services fifth annual report on the effect of waiver on child safety and permanency for 13 Ohio counties indicates that on average rural counties performed significantly better that urban counties on reunification rates (by 18%) and median duration of reunification before re-entry into the foster care system (19% better) (ODJFS).

However, this phenomenon is not unique to Ohio.  A study of comparison between North Carolina's rural and urban child welfare agencies concluded that in spite of challenges faced by rural areas such as greater poverty, a narrower range of employment opportunities, and scarcity of resources (transportation, childcare and specialized social services), "on average, North Carolina's rural child welfare agencies are doing as well or better that urban agencies in terms of outcome and process measures" (Jordan Institute for Families, 2007).

# CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

## *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to identify potential factors, which may contribute to

variations in effectiveness of foster care networks in two counties-one urban and one

rural.  The factors were identified based on the perceptions of the 30 participants in the

study, who were selected using the random purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 1990).

The effectiveness of the foster care networks for the purpose of this study was defined by

the networks' success in securing permanency for the children.  Lack of adequate

permanency for foster children is a national problem, and causes various emotional and

behavioral problems for these children as they grow into adults without any stability or

healthy attachments.

   After consideration of various research methods and approaches, this researcher

identified the qualitative case study method with grounded theory approach as an

exceptional strategy for this study, because of the study's focus on gaining insight about a

widespread social problem (lack of adequate permanency opportunities for foster

children) and the explicit attempt to generate theories on how to solve the problem

(Maxwell, 1996; Brandriet, 1994).  Furthermore, the personal meaning placed on the

particular situations, events or actions in qualitative research process is generally strength of this research method (Maxwell, 1996) and coincided well with the purpose of this study, which is to understand an effective foster care network in terms of ensuring permanency for foster children.

Although quantitative descriptive statistics have been used to establish the fact that there are variations in effectiveness of foster care networks between rural and urban Ohio counties, this study utilized a qualitative research design with grounded theory approach to collect and analyze the data. By using the grounded theory approach I intended to identify potential theories that would explain these variations.

The indicators of success in securing permanency for foster children for the purpose of this study are: 1) the percentage of children reunited with families in less than 12 months after removal from home (higher percentage demonstrates higher level of success---this is also a component of the federal evaluation of states' efforts in the area of permanency); 2) average number of days a child remains in placement (lower number of days, demonstrates higher level of success- this information is measured and recorded by all counties. The longer a child remains in out-of-home care, his/her chances for permanency diminish); and 3) the median number of days it takes for adoption finalization from the time permanent custody is obtained (lower number of days, demonstrates higher level of success- this information is also measured and recorded by all counties, and again the longer it takes for a permanent placement for a child the chances diminish).

## _Variations between rural versus urban counties_

The following quantitative data was obtained from the Ohio Department of Job and Families (ODJFS) and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PSCAO) databases to establish the fact that there are variations in effectiveness of foster care networks in securing permanency for children in rural versus urban counties in Ohio.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, (ODJFS) is the largest agency in the state, which is responsible for supervising the state's child and adult protective services, adoption, child care, public assistance, workforce development, unemployment compensation and child support program. ODJFS collects data from all 88 Ohio counties, which include the data cited for this research. The data is published on an annual basis.

The Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) is an advocate for children policies and issues in Ohio. PCSAO is a private non-profit association for the county public children services agencies charged with child protection throughout Ohio. PCSAO collects data from various child serving agencies (including child welfare agencies) and publish the data on a bi-annual basis. This researcher analyzed the data available for the most recent three periods (2008, 2009 and 2010) for the ODJFS, and the most recent five periods (2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011) for PSCAO. The average data was compared for the rural and urban counties. Data comparison of 40 Ohio counties (20 urban counties, consisting of 10 largest and 10 smallest urban counties; and 20 rural counties, consisting of 10 smallest and 10 largest rural counties) indicate that the rural counties are more effective than urban counties in regards to the child permanency indicators for this research. The rural counties were more successful in regards to the

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percentage of children reunited with their families in less than 12 months after removal

from home by 8.5 percent; for the median number of days children remain in out of home

placement by 21 percent; and for the median number of days for adoption finalization by

after permanent custody is granted by 9 percent). The data for each of the 40 counties is

included in chapter 2. Following charts show additional variations between the 40 rural

and urban counties analyzed for this study.

The percentage of reunifications in less than 12 months for the 20 rural counties on

average was 78.73 percent and for the 20 urban counties on average was 70.24 percent.

Since the sooner the children are reunited with their families the chances for successful

permanency increase, the foster care networks in rural counties are on average more

effective.
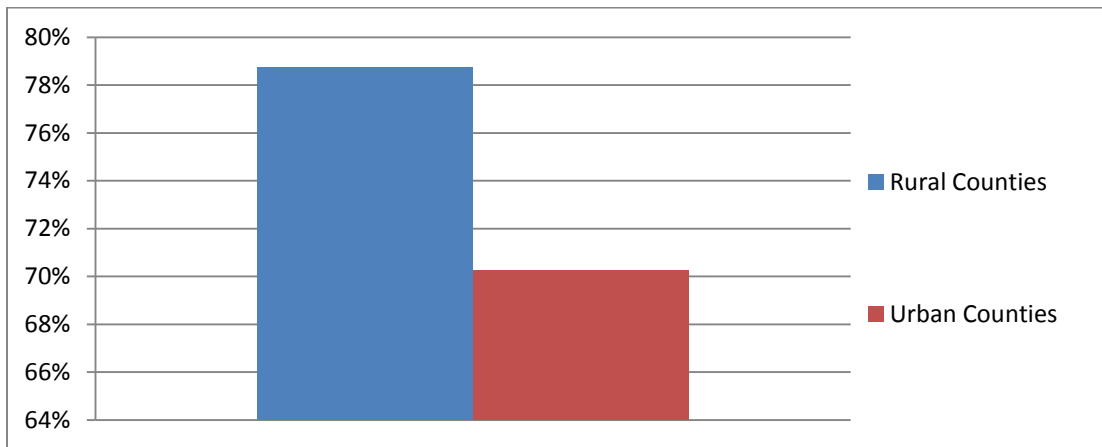


**Figure 2. The Percentage of Children Reunified in Less Than 12 Months.**
Data from Ohio Department of Job and Families (ODJFS) Statistical and Demographic Data
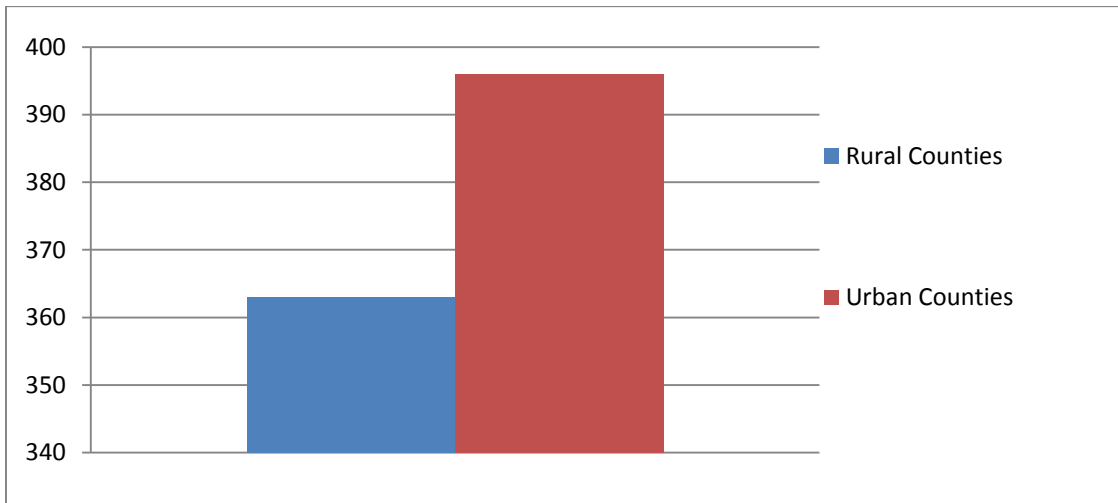(Average of 2008, 2009 and 2010 data).

The median number of days children remain in out-of-home placement following

removal from home for the 20 rural counties on average is 274 days and for the 20 urban

counties on average it is 333 days.

The lower number of days in this process indicates higher chances for successful

permanency.
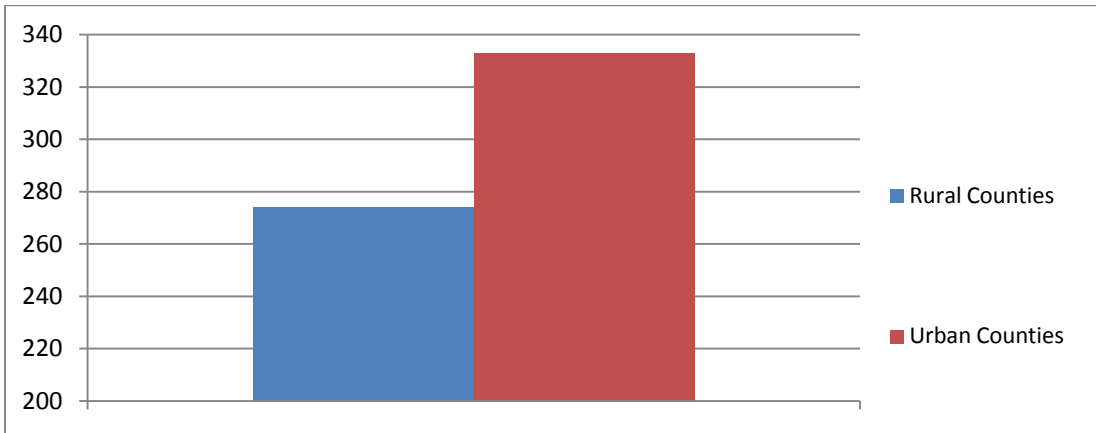


**Figure 3. The Median Number of Days Children Remain in Placement.**
Average of 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 data from the Public Children Services Association
of Ohio (PSCAO) (8th, 9th, 10th and 11th editions).


The number of days for adoption finalization following permanent custody for the 20

rural counties on average is 363 days, while for the 20 urban counties on average it is 396

days. The lower the number of days in this process, the higher is the chances for

successful permanency.



**Figure 4. Median Number of Days for Adoption Finalization.**
Average of 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 data from the Public Children Services Association
of Ohio (PSCAO) (8th, 9th, 10th and 11th editions).

## *The urban and rural counties selected for this study*

To explore potential factors for variations in foster care network effectiveness between rural and urban counties, one rural county and one urban county were selected for this study. The data for this study was qualitative and was collected through in-depth field interviews with individuals from organizations that make up each foster care network in the urban and rural counties (child welfare agencies, juvenile courts, private foster care agencies, and foster). The selected counties are identified as urban and rural based on definition by the Office of Management and Budget (List of Rural Counties, 2005).

There is no federal government definition for an urban or a rural county. The governmental agencies use different definitions based on their policy objectives, typically to determine funding eligibility. The sources for the rural and urban definitions typically include the U.S. Census Bureau, Office of Management and Budget, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service, and Rural Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) Codes (Miller, N.D.). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services utilizes the OMB definition to identify counties as rural or urban.

For the purpose of this study, the definition from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has been utilized (any county that is designated as part of a Metropolitan Area is an urban county, and any county that is not designated as part of a Metropolitan Area is a rural county), since it matched the data already available. Based on the OMB definition 48 Ohio counties are considered rural and the other 40 are considered Urban. The following table summarizes general characteristics of the urban and rural counties selected for this study. It includes a variety of data for the two counties. This is primarily for familiarization of the reader with the two counties through a snapshot. The

data may also suggest that the two counties vary in regards to a variety of social, health and welfare indicators.

**Table 4. The Urban and Rural County Characteristics.**

| THE URBAN AND RURAL COUNTY CHARACTERISTICS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Characteristics** | **Urban County** | **Rural County** | **State of Ohio** |
| Percentage of population under age of 18 (2011)* | 23% | 25% | 24% |
| Rate of children in out-of-home care per 1,000 (2011)** | 6.89 | 4.17 | 4.53 |
| Percentage of children in temporary custody (2011)** | 64% | 70% | 71% |
| Percentage of children in permanent custody (2011)** | 30% | 17% | 19% |
| Percentage of children in planned permanent living arrangement (2011)** | 4% | 13% | 10% |
| Percentage of children removed as the result of physical abuse (2011)** | 12% | 9% | 12% |
| Percentage of children removed as the result of sexual abuse (2011)** | 5% | 2% | 3% |
| Percentage of children removed as the result of neglect (2011)** | 39% | 26% | 28% |
| Percentage of children removed as the result of dependency (2011)** | 19% | 40% | 25% |
| Percentage of children removed as the result of delinquency/unruly (2011)** | 1% | 2% | 4% |
| Percentage of children removed as the result of other issues (2011)** | 24% | 21% | 28% |
| Percentage of child reunification in less than 12 months (2011)* | 51.7% | 75.45% | 68.5% |
| Median number of days children remain in placement (2011)** | 426 | 235 | 274 |
| Median number of days for adoption finalization (2011)** | 653 | 586 | 343 |
| Per capita income (2010)* | $41,909 | $29,966 | $36,162 |
| Unemployment rate (2011)* | 8% | 7.3% | 8.6% |
| Poverty rate (2010)* | 18.2% | 12.6% | 15.8% |
| Poverty rate for children (under age of 18) (2010)* | 28.6% | 20.4% | 23.1% |
| Teen pregnancy rate (under age of 18) (2010)*** | 39.8/1,000 | 23/1,000 | 30.1/1,000 |
| Teen birth rate (under age of 18) (2010)* | 17.6/1,000 | 10.6/1,000 | 16/1,000 |
| High school graduation rate (2011)* | 75.5% | 90.2% | 84.3% |

**\*Ohio Department of Job and Families (ODJFS) Statistical and Demographic Data**
**\*\*Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PSCAO) (11th Edition)**
**\*\*\*Ohio Department of Health, Center for Public Health Statistics and Informatics**

The foster care networks' success rates in securing permanency as determined by the indicators discussed earlier (the percentage of children reunited with families in less than 12 months, the median number of days a child remains in placement, and the median number of days it takes for adoption finalization from the time permanent custody is obtained), varies significantly between the urban and rural counties selected for this study (independent variables).

**Table 5. Percentage of Children Reunified in Less Than 12 Months.**

| PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN REUNIFIED IN LESS THAN 12 MONTHS | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Years Data Reported by ODJFS | | | |
| | **2010** | **2009** | **2008** | |
| **Rural County** | 86.5% | 75.4% | 82.00% | |
| **Average of Three Reporting Periods** | | | | **81.30%** |
| | Years Data Reported by ODJFS | | | |
| | **2010** | **2009** | **2008** | |
| **Urban County** | 63% | 51% | 55.2% | |
| **Average of Three Reporting Periods** | | | | **56.40%** |

**Ohio Department of Job and Families (ODJFS) Statistical and Demographic Data (average of 2008, 2009 and 2010 data)**

Based on the average of data available for the most recent three (3) years (2008, 2009 and 2010), the rural county's foster care network is more successful in securing permanency for foster children by 44 percent for the percentage of children reunified in less than 12 months.

The rate for the rural county is 81 percent, while the rate for the urban county is 56 percent.
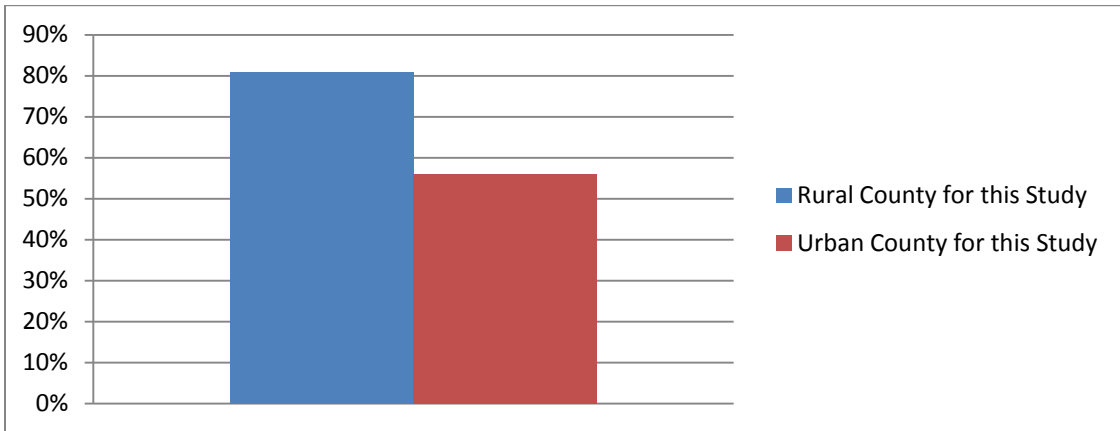


**Figure 5. Percentage of Reunifications in Less Than 12 Months.**
Ohio Department of Job and Families (ODJFS) Statistical and Demographic Data (average of 2008, 2009 and 2010 data).
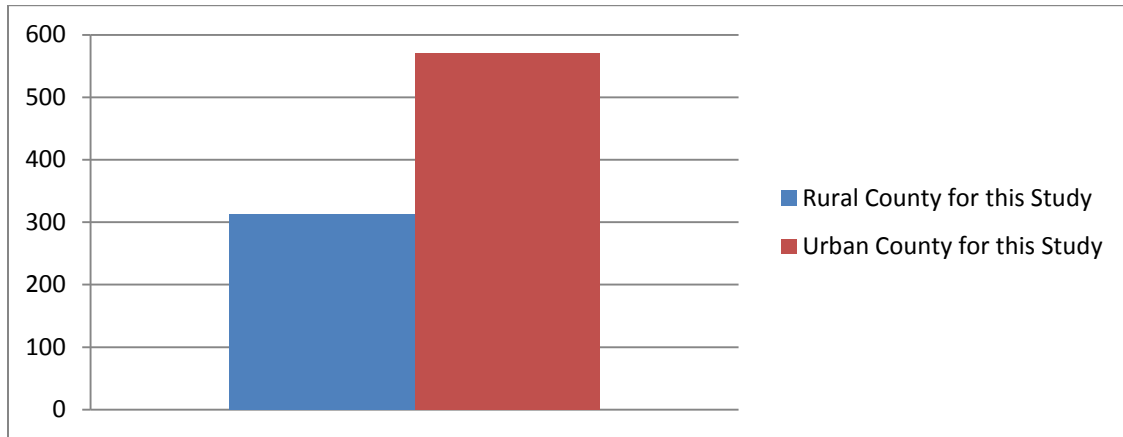
Based on the average data available for the most recent five periods (2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011), the rural county's foster care network is more successful in securing permanency for foster children by 82 percent in regards to the median number of days a child remains in out-of-home placement.

**Table 6. Median Number of Days Children Remain in Placement.**

| MEDIAN NUMBER OF DAYS CHILDREN REMAIN IN PLACEMENT | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Years Data Reported by PCSAO | | | | | |
| | **2011** | **2009** | **2007** | **2005** | **2003** | |
| **Rural County** | 235 | 539 | 370 | 229 | 194 | |
| **Average of Five Reporting Periods** | | | | | | **313** |
| | Years Data Reported by PCSAO | | | | | |
| | **2011** | **2009** | **2007** | **2005** | **2003** | |
| **Urban County** | 426 | 870 | 555 | 536 | 464 | |
| **Average of Five Reporting Periods** | | | | | | **518** |

**Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PSCAO) (8th, 9th, 10th and 11th editions, data for reporting periods 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011).**

The median number of days a child remains in out of home placement in the rural

county is 313 days, while it is 570 days for the urban county.



**Figure 6. The Median Number of Days Children Remain in Placement.**
Average of data for the most recent five (5) periods (2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011) from the
Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PSCAO) (8th, 9th, 10th and 11th editions).


Based on the average data available for the most recent five periods (2003, 2005, 2007,

2009 and 2011), the rural county's foster care network is more successful in finalizing

adoptions after obtaining permanent custody by 37 percent.

**Table 7. The Median Number of Days for Adoption Finalization.**

| MEDIAN NUMBER OF DAYS FOR ADOPTION FINALIZATION FOLLOWING PERMANENT CUSTODY | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Years Data Reported by PCSAO** | | | | | |
| | **2011** | **2009** | **2007** | **2005** | **2003** | |
| **Rural County** | 586 | 392 | 364 | 474 | 361 | |
| **Average of Five Reporting Periods** | | | | | | **435** |
| | **Years Data Reported by PCSAO** | | | | | |
| | **2011** | **2009** | **2007** | **2005** | **2003** | |
| **Urban County** | 653 | 533 | 737 | 545 | 517 | |
| **Average of Five Reporting Periods** | | | | | | **597** |

**Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PSCAO) (8th, 9th, 10th and 11th editions,
data for reporting periods 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011)**

The median number of days for adoption finalization in the rural county is 435 days, while the number of days for adoption finalization in the urban county is 597 days.
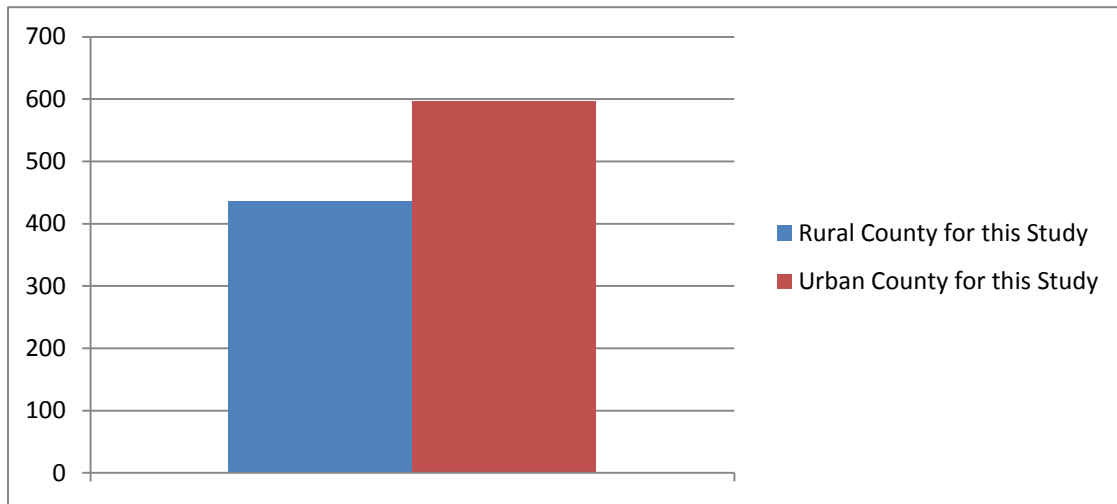


**Figure 7. The Median Number of Days for Adoption Finalization.**
Average of data for the most recent five (5) periods (2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011) from the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PSCAO) (8th, 9th, 10th and 11th editions).

## *Purpose Overview*

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors (based on the perceptions of the participants in the study), which contribute to variations in effectiveness of foster care networks in a rural and urban county in Ohio.  For the purpose of this study network effectiveness is determined using the client outcome approach.  The client outcome being measured for this study was is the permanency for children in our foster care system. The client outcome approach is conducive for this study, since a paramount objective of a network in the health and human services field (i.e., foster care) is to deliver service(s) to clients to elicit positive outcomes.  The normative nature of the study is expected to contribute knowledge and theory to help enhance opportunities for permanency for children in foster care.  Factors identified as contributors to network effectiveness might be adopted by rural and urban foster care networks in Ohio and beyond.

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## *Qualitative Methodology*

A primary reason for choosing the qualitative approach to conducting this study is that it is the hope of this researcher that it will influence policy in regards foster care, and particularly the permanency issue. Since qualitative researchers can influence social policy in significant ways (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), this researcher is hoping to "isolate target populations (foster children), show the immediate effects of certain processes and activities on such groups, and isolate the constraints that operate against policy changes in such settings" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 30).

This researcher's decision to utilize the grounded theory as the research method included the objective to identify potential theories, which can be formulated and tested, in regards to the factors that may contribute to variations in performance of foster care networks in rural and urban counties. The grounded theory approach is ideal for the purpose of developing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and since the existing network literature does not explain variations for network effectiveness in rural and urban counties, the researcher decided to obtain and analyze data from individuals who are living in the situation (by looking through the microscope) to find out what they see that are suggestive of possible new theories. Also, the grounded theory method is useful when the researcher is insightful regarding the topic of the study through having professional experience or knowledge of the topic (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher's extensive experience in the field of public administration, including knowledge of the foster care system and issues related to permanency, was helpful in gathering and analyzing the information for the study.

The Grounded Theory approach, initially developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967) is an inductive, theory developing approach to qualitative research, and is a methodology of

developing inductive theories that are grounded in methodically gathered and analyzed data.  Data collection, analysis, interpretation, and theory development are mutually supporting and repetitive in grounded theory everything is integrated and nothing happens in a vacuum (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).  The qualitative interviewing associated with the grounded theory method provides an open-ended and in-depth exploration of an aspect of life (such as living in a foster care system) about which the research participant has substantial experience, combined with considerable insight.

However, the researcher must guard against the interference of his/her experience and insight to ensure unbiased and process of data collection, analysis and interpretation.  The participants may find their engagement to be rewarding, as they may discover new views of themselves or the situations and events that shape them (Charmaz, 2003).  The basic grounded theory question driving the research pertains to the realities of the situation as perceived by the participants, pertaining to the central issue addressed in the research (Glaser, 1978).  The process of building grounded theory consists of different phases, which include identifying the research problem, developing the research question(s), data collection, data coding, data analysis and interpretation, theory development and recommendations for practice.  The following diagram summarizes the grounded theory research approach I utilized for this study.
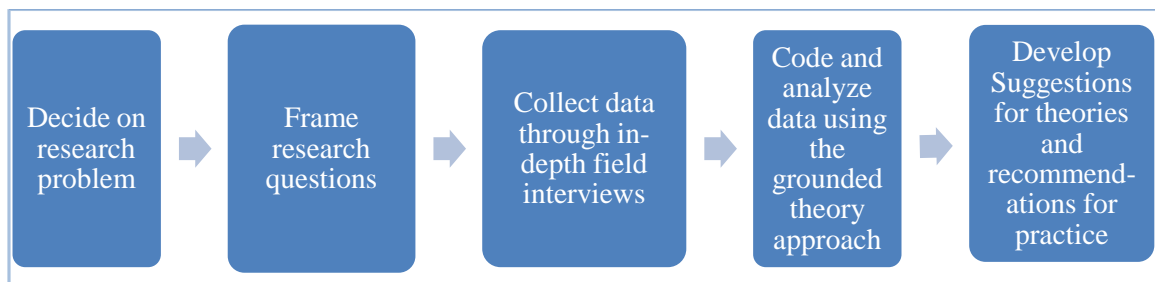


**Figure 8. Grounded Theory Research Method Summary.**
Adapted from Bitsch (2005).

### *Research Questions*

The research questions for this study were:

1. Do perceptions about the availability of adequate financial resources as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

2. Do perceptions about network cohesiveness as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

3. Do perceptions about community participation/support as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

4. Do perceptions about the stakeholder knowledge/competency as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

5. Do perceptions about foster parent demographic characteristics as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

6. What other factors are perceived as significant in determining foster care network effectiveness among urban and rural county stakeholders?

The interview questions were designed to generate answers for the research questions as outlined below:

**Research Question 1-** perceptions about the availability of adequate financial resources:

**Related Interview Questions:**

- What are the barriers to successful permanency in your county?

- How can we ensure successful permanency for foster children?

- How would you rate the success of permanency efforts in your county?

- Do you feel that the level of financial reimbursement to foster families is adequate?  How would an increase in the amount help with securing successful permanency?

- Do you feel that there are adequate supports for families who want to adopt foster children?  Please elaborate.

- Do you feel that there is adequate support for kinship programs? Please elaborate.

- Are there adequate supportive services in the community to help effectively care for foster children (case management, crisis intervention, afterschool programs, family support groups, mentors, etc.)?

  What may be some examples of available or unavailable resources that may impact the lives of foster children and securing permanency for them?

**Research Question 2-** perceptions about network cohesiveness:

**Related Interview Questions:**

- What are the barriers to successful permanency in your county?

- How can we ensure successful permanency for foster children?

- How would you rate the success of permanency efforts in your county?

- How easy is it for you to communicate with staff from child welfare agencies, courts, adoption/foster care agencies, foster families, biological/custodial families, and community volunteers (i.e., mentors)?  How often do you communicate with the above components?  Do you feel the level of communication is adequate? What are the success factors and barriers?

- How important is the communication process between these components in securing successful permanency for foster children? Please elaborate on your

experiences. How would you describe the significance of "red tape" in regards to securing permanency for children? What are your experiences in this area?

**Research Question 3-** perceptions about community/citizen participation and support:

**Related Interview Questions:**

- What are the barriers to successful permanency in your county?

- How can we ensure successful permanency for foster children?

- How would you rate the success of permanency efforts in your county?

- Do you feel that organizations' staff, foster families and other stakeholders are adequately knowledgeable and trained to help secure permanency?

- How would additional knowledge, training and other expertise help in this area? Please elaborate.

**Research Question 4-** perceptions about the stakeholder knowledge and competency:

**Related Interview Questions:**

- What are the barriers to successful permanency in your county?

- How can we ensure successful permanency for foster children?

- How would you rate the success of permanency efforts in your county?

- Do you feel that the community citizens/ businesses/ foundations are adequately supportive and involved in caring for foster children and helping with securing permanency?

- Is the general community aware of the significance of the issue?

- Do you feel that if the community were more knowledgeable about the significance of this issue they would be more involved and supportive?

**Research Question 5-** perceptions about foster parent demographic characteristics:

**Related Interview Questions:**

- Do you feel that placement of foster children with families of same race/ethnicity is important in regards to securing permanency for children? Please elaborate.

- Do you feel that the age of foster parents are important in securing permanency for children? Please elaborate.

- Do you feel that the number of other foster children and or/biological children in the home is important in regards to securing permanency for children? Please elaborate.

- Do you feel that the education level of foster parents is important in securing permanency for children? Please elaborate.

**Research Question 6-** other factors perceived as significant in foster care network effectiveness:

**Related Interview Questions:**

- What are the barriers to successful permanency in your county?

- How can we ensure successful permanency for foster children?

- How would you rate the success of permanency efforts in your county?

- Do you have any questions for me?

- Would you like to add anything?

### *Variables*

The dependent variable for this study is "network effectiveness," which is identified by a network's ability to secure "permanency" for foster children in its care. The effectiveness

in this regard is measured by the amount of time it takes for the foster care network to reunify children with their families, the time it takes for adoption finalization, and the duration of placement in out of home care. The independent variables for this study are the rural and urban counties. The intervening variables are: 1) financial resources; 2) network cohesiveness; 3) community/ citizen participation and support; and 4) effectiveness of each network component (level of knowledge and expertise). These intervening variables were determined through review of network literature, and experience with the issues associated with foster care.

**Table 8. Questions to Assess Intervening Variables.**

| INTERVENING VARIABLES: | QUESTIONS TO ASSESS THE VARIABLES |
|---|---|
| **Financial Resources** | <ul><li>What are the barriers to successful permanency in your county?</li><li>How can we ensure successful permanency for foster children?</li><li>How would you rate the success of permanency efforts in your county?</li><li>Do you feel that the level of financial reimbursement to foster families is adequate? How would an increase in the amount help with securing successful permanency?</li><li>Do you feel that there are adequate supports for families who want to adopt foster children? Please elaborate.</li><li>Do you feel that there is adequate support for kinship programs? Please elaborate.</li><li>Are there adequate supportive services in the community to help effectively care for foster children (case management, crisis intervention, afterschool programs, family support groups, mentors, etc.)?</li><li>What may be some examples of available or unavailable resources that may impact the lives of foster children and securing permanency for them?</li></ul> |

**Table 8 - Continued**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Level of Network Cohesiveness** | <ul><li>What are the barriers to successful permanency in your county?</li><li>How can we ensure successful permanency for foster children?</li><li>How would you rate the success of permanency efforts in your county?</li><li>How easy is it for you to communicate with staff from child welfare agencies, courts, adoption/foster care agencies, foster families, biological/custodial families, and community volunteers (i.e., mentors)?  How often do you communicate with the above components?  Do you feel the level of communication is adequate?  What are the success factors and barriers?</li><li>How important is the communication process between these components in securing successful permanency for foster children? Please elaborate on your experiences.</li><li>How would you describe the significance of "red tape" in regards to securing permanency for children?  What are your experiences in this area?</li></ul> |
| **Knowledge/ Expertise** | <ul><li>What are the barriers to successful permanency in your county?</li><li>How can we ensure successful permanency for foster children?</li><li>How would you rate the success of permanency efforts in your county?</li><li>Do you feel that organizations' staff, foster families and other stakeholders are adequately knowledgeable and trained to help secure permanency?</li><li>How would additional knowledge, training and other expertise help in this area?  Please elaborate.</li></ul> |
| **Level of Community Support** | <ul><li>What are the barriers to successful permanency in your county?</li><li>How can we ensure successful permanency for foster children?</li><li>How would you rate the success of permanency efforts in your county?</li><li>Do you feel that the community citizens/ businesses/ foundations are adequately supportive and involved in caring for foster children and helping with securing permanency?</li><li>Is the general community aware of the significance of the issue?</li><li>Do you feel that if the community were more knowledgeable about the significance of this issue they would be more involved and supportive?</li></ul> |

### *Population and Sample*

A random purposeful sampling approach (Patton, 1990) was utilized to select and engage 30 individuals who are closely involved with issues related with the foster care system.  This is a process of identifying a population of interest by systematically selecting cases that are not based on advanced knowledge of how the outcomes would develop (ideal for a grounded theory research method).

This researcher contacted the staff at the highest level of each agency (directors, judges) and obtained letters of commitment for their participation in the study, and subsequently scheduled face-to-face interviews with them through phone calls and emails.  The researcher also asked the agency directors and juvenile court judges to identify staff who they viewed as ideal candidates for this study in terms of their knowledge and experience regarding the foster care system and permanency issue.  The participants were subsequently contacted and face-to-face interviews were scheduled.

The foster families for the study were recruited through a letter, which was distributed by the county child welfare agencies and foster care agencies.  The letter (a copy is attached) explained the nature of the study, the nature of foster families' participation and my telephone/email for them to contact me.  The foster families were also provided with a $25 gift card for their participation in the study.

The populations for this study included individuals who work with foster children in various capacities, and have extensive knowledge of the foster care system and the issues that impact successful permanency for foster children.  These individuals work at various levels of organizations that make up each foster care network in the rural and urban counties selected for this research.  They include staff at the highest levels of each

organization, mid-level managers and direct care staff who work closely with the children and their families.  The sample population also included foster families (some of whom have also adopted and provided kinship care) from each county.

   The participants included: 1) staff from each of the child welfare agencies in the rural and urban counties, including the Directors, mid-level supervisors, and staff who work directly with foster children and foster families; 2) staff from each of the juvenile courts in the rural and urban count counties, including juvenile court judges, mid-level  staff (i.e., magistrate, assistant prosecutor) and individuals who work directly with foster children and foster families (i.e., public defender, intervention specialist); 3) staff from one private, non-profit foster care agency in each of the rural and urban counties, including the Directors, mid-level supervisors, and staff who work directly with foster children and foster families; and 4) foster families from each of the rural and urban counties, including families who have adopted the children from the foster care system. The population of 30 participants for this study (15 from each of the counties) has an average of 16.5 years of experience with issues related to this study, with a range of formal experience of 2- 43 years.  The age range of the respondents was 31 - 60+ and their education level was from high school diploma to Ph.D. and Juris Doctor (JD).  A detailed listing of the participants and information regarding each participant is included in chapter four.


### *Data Collection*

The purpose of these semi-structured interviews was to examine participants' perceptions of the factors contribute to the successful permanency for children in out-of-home care.

Data for this study was collected through face-to-face interviews with the 30 study

participants (15 participants from each of the two counties selected for this study).  Prior

to start of the data collection, I submitted an application to the Internal Review Board

(IRB) at the Cleveland State University to approve my research project.  Open ended

questions were asked during the semi-structured interviews to allow for in-depth

exploration of the issues related to the foster care system, particularly the "permanency"

issue.  As a characteristic of the grounded theory approach to research, open ended

questions enabled me to benefit from the interviewees' substantial experience and insight

pertaining to the problem being explored.  The interview also included specific questions

regarding participants' perceptions on the relationships between demographic

characteristics of the foster families and success of permanency efforts.  Detailed notes

were taken during the interview process, which then were coded and analyzed manually

through the grounded theory approach.


*Data Analysis*

The data collected through interviews were analyzed using the Grounded Theory's open

coding method (Straus & Corbin, 1998).  The first step for analyzing the data through the

grounded theory method is to code the data starting from small pieces of information, and

ultimately forming categories of data.  The notes that were taken during the interviews

were typed up, and coded using phrases, followed by sentences and paragraphs.  This

researcher used different color highlighters to identify phrases, sentences and paragraphs

for the information that fit similar themes.  Open coding patterns were developed, which

led to categories of data.  The codes and categories were structured in accordance with

the nature of the interview questions, as well separate categories for the data that did not fit the interview questions. The codes, and subsequent categories, included participant responses to the open ended questions, as well as other relevant input. As themes began to emerge from the initial categories of data, the axial coding process was used to merge the initial categories and create larger categories of data to develop the theoretical framework for this study.

During the process of open coding and subsequent axial coding, the data from one interview was compared with similar data from previous interviews to look for emerging themes, through a process, which is referred to as a continuous comparative process (Straus & Corbin, 1998). Interviews continued until the point of saturation, when no new information for current or new categories of data was being generated. The hints of saturation began to emerge after 25 interviews were completed, and interviews were continued for 30 participants, after which the point of saturation was determined. Notes/memos that were prepared during the entire process helped with capturing the significant points, developing themes and interpretation of data.

This information was then compiled separately for respondents from each county's foster care network, to allow for comparison of responses for each network. The themes that emerged from the data were shared with some of the participants for verification.

# CHAPTER 4

# RESEARCH FINDINGS

## *Introduction*

The purpose of this research was to identify factors that contribute to effectiveness of foster care networks in securing permanency for children, through exploration of network participants' perceptions in urban and rural settings. A review of descriptive data for urban and rural counties in Ohio indicates that foster care networks in rural counties are in general more successful in securing permanency for children. This fact was established through data comparison for 40 counties (20 rural and 20 urban) as described in the previous chapter. This study was designed to explore one rural and one urban county's foster care networks to determine what factors may be contributing to the variations in effectiveness of networks in rural and urban counties in Ohio.

Field interviews were conducted with 30 foster care network stakeholders from two Ohio counties-one urban and one rural (15 from each county). The stakeholders who participated in this study have intimate knowledge of the foster care system and permanency issue. Participants included staff from the child welfare agencies, the juvenile courts, private foster care agencies, as well as foster families from the two counties. Most of the foster parents who participated in this research had also adopted

children, were in process of adopting or were kinship caregivers.  The agency staff

included those at the highest levels of each agency (directors and judges), mid-level staff

and direct care staff who interacted with the families and children on a daily basis.  The

mix of participants allowed for collection of data based on perceptions of a diverse group

who have unique knowledge of issues pertaining to the topics of this study.

The following table summarizes the demographic data for the research participants.

The average length of experience for the participants in the field was 16.5 years.  The age

range for participants was 31-60+, and they included eight men and 22 women.  Four of

the research participants were Black and 26 were White.  The participants included eight

staff from the child welfare agencies, seven individuals associated with the juvenile

courts, eight staff from the private foster care agencies and seven foster families.

**Table 9. Research Participant Demographics.**

| County | Participant | Network Affiliation | Length Of Experience | Age | Education Level | Gender | Race/ Ethnicity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | CCFC01 | Foster Care Agency | 40 years | 60+ | Masters LISW | M | White |
| Urban | CCFC02 | Foster Care Agency | 19 years | 41-45 | Bachelors LSW | F | Black |
| Urban | CCFC03 | Foster Care Agency | 26 years | 51-55 | Associate LCDC II | F | White |
| Urban | CCFC04 | Foster Care Agency | 20 years | 46-50 | Bachelor's LSW | M | White |
| Urban | CCFF01 | Foster Family & Kinship | 16 years | 46-50 | High School | F | Black |
| Urban | CCFF02 | Foster Family & in process of adopting | 2 years | 36-40 | Associate | F | White |
| Urban | CCFF03 | Foster Family | 4 years | 46-50 | Bachelors | F | White |
| Urban | CCFF04 | Foster Family & has adopted | 4 years | 56-60 | Bachelors | F | White |
| Urban | CCJC01 | Juvenile Court | 8 years | 41-45 | Juris Doctor | F | White |
| Urban | CCJC02 | Juvenile Court | 23 years | 46-50 | Master's | M | White |
| Urban | CCJC03 | Juvenile Court | 8 years | 60+ | Juris Doctor | F | White |

**Table 9 - Continued**

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | CCWA01 | Child Welfare Agency | 30 years | 51-55 | Juris Doctor | F | White |
| Urban | CCWA02 | Child Welfare Agency | 26 years | 46-50 | Masters | F | Black |
| Urban | CCWA03 | Child Welfare Agency | 25 years | 41-45 | Bachelors | M | White |
| Urban | CCWA04 | Child Welfare Agency | 17 years | 51-55 | Bachelors | F | Black |
| Rural | WCFC01 | Foster Care Agency | 43 yeas | 60+ | Masters | M | White |
| Rural | WCFC02 | Foster Care Agency | 14 years | 60+ | Masters | M | White |
| Rural | WCFC03 | Foster Care Agency | 14 years | 36-40 | Masters | F | White |
| Rural | WCFC04 | Foster Care Agency | 15 years | 41-45 | Masters | F | White |
| Rural | WCFF01 | Faster Family & Has adopted | 13 years | 56-60 | Masters | F | White |
| Rural | WCFF02 | Faster Family | 8 years | 51-55 | High School | F | White |
| Rural | WCFF03 | Faster Family & has adopted | 16 years | 51-55 | High School | F | White |
| Rural | WCJC01 | Juvenile Court | 8 years | 31-35 | Juris Doctor | F | White |
| Rural | WCJC02 | Juvenile Court | 14 years | 36-40 | Juris Doctor | M | White |
| Rural | WCJC03 | Juvenile Court | 6 years | 36-40 | Bachelors | F | White |
| Rural | WCJC04 | Juvenile Court | 2 years | 31-35 | Juris Doctor | F | White |
| Rural | WCWA01 | Child Welfare Agency | 20 years | 41-45 | Juris Doctor | M | White |
| Rural | WCWA02 | Child Welfare Agency | 23 years | 46-50 | Bachelors | F | White |
| Rural | WCWA03 | Child Welfare Agency | 15 years | 51-55 | Bachelors LSW | F | White |
| Rural | WCWA04 | Child Welfare Agency | 17 years | 41-45 | Bachelors LSW | F | White |

The interviews were conducted primarily in staff offices, agency conference rooms,

my office, Cleveland State University and foster family homes.  The interviews began on

November 24, 2012, after obtaining approval from the Cleveland State University

Internal Review Board (IRB), and were concluded on March 4, 2013. The interviews

typically lasted for 90 minutes.  However, some of the interviews lasted for up to 3 hours.

## *Organization of Data Analysis*

The questions during the field interviews included open ended questions that were designed to explore participants' perceptions regarding the factors that contributed to the successful permanency for children, including barriers to permanency and their suggested solutions. The data collected through in-depth interviews was analyzed utilizing the grounded theory method, as described in the previous chapter. Following the process of data analysis, eight themes emerged, which are listed in the "Emerging Themes" and discussed in the "Results" sections below.

## *Emerging Themes*

As the result of the analysis of data obtained through in-depth interviews several themes emerged. The Emerging themes from this research included: 1) financial resources; 2) cohesiveness; 3) community participation and support; 4) competency and commitment; 5) programs and services; 6) proactive approach; 7) kinship care; and 8) discretionary powers. These themes emerged following the coding and categorizing of the data obtained from the in-depth field interviews.

## *Findings*

The research identified eight factors that were perceived by the participants as determinants of foster care network's effectiveness in securing permanency for children in an urban and rural setting, in addition to foster parent demographics that are presented separately. The following tables summarize the research findings with similarities and

differences between the perceptions of urban and rural county participants and a more

detailed discussion of the results will follow:

**Table 10. Variations between participant's perceptions (open-ended questions).**

| FACTORS | SUMMARY RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS Variations Between the Urban and Rural Counties | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Urban County** | **Rural County** | **Variations** |
| **Need for Proactive Approach** <br><br> **(New Finding)** | Participants felt that if we take a proactive approach in addressing the biological families' issues such as mental health challenges, parenting skills and financial difficulties, there would be less incidences of child removal from homes. | Similar to the urban county participants, the rural county participants also emphasized the need for more of the proactive approach to eliminate the incidences of knee jerk responses to the problems. | This issue was important as a factor by participants from both counties similarly. <br><br> This issue was perceived as an important factor by the juvenile court and child welfare agency staff at various levels more than the other research participants. |
| **Discreti-nonary Powers** <br><br> **(New Finding)** | Practice of extensive discretionary powers amongst network organization staff was perceived as problematic by the participants from the urban county. They felt that individuals make decisions regarding future of children arbitrarily based on their bias, and not based on the facts. | The participants from the rural county also perceived exercising of unchecked discretionary powers as problematic, but in much lesser extent. This variation may be due to the significantly smaller number of staff and stakeholders who have the ability to make unchecked decisions. | This factor was perceived as more problematic amongst the urban county participants, which appeared to be contributed to the size and complexity of the urban county's foster care network. <br><br> The foster families perceived this issue as a major problem in the way of securing permanency, followed by the child welfare agency staff at various levels. |

**Table 10 - Continued**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Community Partici-pation & Support**<br><br>**(New Finding)** | Except for some foundation support, the participants viewed the community participation and support as non-existent. Participants perceived that the negative media coverage of the foster care system, as well as lack of community awareness of the extent of the problem contributes to the lack of community support for this issue. | Although some of the participants from the rural county viewed the community support and participation as inadequate, there were positive comments in this area as well. The perception of some rural county participants (as well some urban county participants) was that the small community and the homogeneous nature of the population in rural county results in more community support for such social problems. | The participants from the rural county perceived the community support in their communities more positively than the participants from the urban county. The size and homogeneous nature of the rural county was cited by participants from both counties as a favorable factor for the rural county network.<br><br>Participants from various levels of the private foster care agencies and foster families in the urban county perceived a lack of community support as a barrier to permanency more strongly that other research participants. |
| **Network Knowledge and Compe-tency**<br><br>**(New Finding)** | Urban county participants perceived the staff from various network organizations as generally competent and knowledgeable. Lack of necessary experience of some social workers in working with high-risk families, and a lack of commitment among some staff was perceived by some urban county participants as a barrier to permanency. Parenting skills and competency of some foster families and biological families were also considered barriers to permanency. | Similar to the participants in the urban county, the rural county participants also perceived staff as generally knowledgeable and competent. Lack of staff commitment and need for additional parenting skills development programs was also emphasized by rural county participants. | The perception regarding knowledge and competency of staff was similar for both counties. Participants from both counties also viewed the lack of staff commitment and inadequate parenting skills as barriers to permanency. There was a difference in perception in level of staff experience. Some urban county participants perceived inadequate level of staff experience which appeared to be associated with high turnover rate and the large number of new staff who do not have hands on experience in the field.<br><br>The child welfare agency social workers and foster families perceived this issue as a problem more than the other research participants. |

**Table 10 - Continued**

| Programs and Resources (New Finding) | Participants from the urban county felt that the existing programs and services can be expanded to better address the needs of families. More importantly, they felt that the hours of operations and locations were not accessible. | The rural county participants felt that there are not as many programs and resources in their county as there are in larger counties. They felt that access to programs and services was difficult. | The rural county participants perceived the lack of adequate programs and services (particularly difficulties accessing them) more negatively than the urban county participants. Lack of adequate access to the services was perceived as a barrier by participants from both counties. The urban county participants viewed difficulty in access to the factors such as hours of operation and not having the awareness of the existing services; while rural county participants perceived the lack of transportation and inability to maneuver the system, due to lack of knowledge and understanding of the system, as a problem. This problem was perceived as a major barrier to permanency more strongly by the child welfare agency social workers and foster families. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Financial Resources (Confirmation of prior research finding) | Lack of adequate financial resources was perceived by participants in the urban county as a barrier to successful permanency for children. This contributed to many of the problems, including staffing levels, lack of necessary programs, not enough support for adoption, lack of support for kinship care, and inadequate reimbursement for foster families. | Participants from the rural county also perceived lack of adequate financial services as a barrier to securing successful permanency for children. The reasoning for the barrier was similar to the participants from the urban county, with added emphasis on availability of programs and services. | There was not a significant variation in perceptions of participants regarding the need for more financial resources. The primary difference was the area of need, which was perceived by the urban counties as staffing and by rural county participants as more programs and services (i.e., transportation) between the Participants. Participants from all network organizations, and from all various levels, equally viewed lack of adequate financial services as a barrier to permanency. |

**Table 10 - Continued**

| Network Cohesive-Ness (Confirmation of prior research finding) | Network cohesiveness was viewed very negatively by the participants from the urban county. The size of the county and lack of standardization which allows for subjective decisions appeared to be the primary reason for lack of network cohesiveness. | Although some of the participants viewed network cohesiveness as a barrier, there were significant comments on the positive aspects of this issue by the rural county participants. This appears to be primarily due to the smaller size of the county and the smaller number of stakeholders. | This factor appeared to be the strongest indicator for variations in the success of the foster care networks in the two counties in securing permanency for children. The participants from the rural county generally had a positive view of the cohesiveness factor, while the urban county participants viewed this factor negatively in strong terms.

The participants from the child welfare agency, private foster care agency and foster families perceived this issue as a bigger problem than the participants from the juvenile courts. Also on average, direct care staff from these agencies perceived this as a bigger barrier to permanency that staff from other organization levels. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kinship Care (Confirmation of prior research finding) | The need for support of the kinship program was perceived by the urban county participants as a key factor for securing permanency for children. Participants overwhelmingly perceived lack of financial support for kinship caregivers as a barrier to permanency. | Similar to the participants from the urban county, the rural county participants also perceived kinship care as a key factor to secure permanency for children and advocated for adequate financial support for relatives to care for foster children. | Participants from both counties perceived the need for expansion of kinship care and enhancement of support for this program in very strong terms. Both groups of participants had similar perceptions of this issue.

The need for the encouragement of kinship care program and more financial support was perceived as a very important factor equally by all network organizations at various levels. |

The results of the responses to the four specific foster parent demographic questions were based on the number and percentages of respondents' views regarding each of the questions.

**Table 11. Variations in participant's perceptions (specific demographic questions).**

| FACTORS | SUMMARY RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS Variations Between the Urban and Rural Counties for Foster Parent Demographics | |
|---|---|---|
| | Urban County | Rural County |
| **Same Race/ Ethnicity Placement** **(New finding)** | Four of the participants (26%) perceived placement of children with different race ethnicity families was not an important factor. 11 participants (74%) perceived this as a negative factor. | Five of the participants (35%) perceived placement of children with different race ethnicity families was not an important factor. Nine participants (65%) perceived this as a negative factor. |
| **Age of the Families** **(New finding)** | Seven participants (47%) of participants perceived the age of foster caregiver as a none-issue. One participant perceived older caregivers as a positive factor. Seven respondents (47%) perceived the placement of children with older caregivers as a negative factor. | 10 participants (71%) of the participants perceived the age of the caregivers as a non-issue. One of the participants felt that placement of children with young families can be a problem. Three participants (21%) perceived the placement of children with older caregivers as a problem. |
| **Number of other children in the home** **(New finding)** | All respondents (100%) perceived the large number of children placed in a home as a negative factor. | All respondents (100%) perceived the large number of children placed in a home as a negative factor. |
| **Education level of families** **(New finding)** | Seven participants (47%) perceived the level of foster families' education as a non-issue. Three of the respondents (20%) viewed higher level of education as a negative factor. Five respondents (33%) perceived foster families' higher level of education as a positive factor. | 12 participants (85%) perceived a foster family's education level as non-issue. Two participants (15%) perceived foster families' higher level of education as a positive factor. |

The findings of this study are divided into two categories: 1) findings that this researcher believes are new, and have not been researched previously; and 2) findings, which confirm the results of prior research.

## NEW FINDINGS

**1) Higher emphasis needs to be placed on a proactive approach to addressing the issues that contribute to child removal/reunification, in order to reduce the extent of the problem.**

Addressing the crisis situations encountered by families through higher emphasis on prevention activities will reduce the number of children removed from homes, ultimately resulting in reduction in the extent of the problem. It is preferred to keep children at home or reunite them with their families as soon as possible to avoid having them linger in the foster care system.  As one of the rural county participants stated *"support biological families to make the changes necessary to resume parenting if at all possible."*

*Intervention* by social workers to address the needs of the child and families will reduce the frequency of removal of the child from home.  One of the urban county participants stated that *"community collaborations have a lot to offer and impact the number of kids that come to the system; they can fix a lot of the problems before they get into the system."*

*Upfront matching* of the children with foster families/other caregivers is a key determinant of the frequency of disruptions and success of permanency for children. According to one of the participants from the rural county, *"upfront matching between child and family is crucial and if the process is rushed, this is a disservice to the families*

*and children,"* and that *"accurate initial assessments to determine level of risk to child*

*and community, and level of needs must be conducted prior to child placement."*

**2) Discretionary powers exercised by various juvenile court and child welfare**

**agency staff can negatively impact the permanency process.**  Unchecked discretionary

powers also emerged as a theme from the data obtained during the interviews.  Research

participants from both counties felt that the lack of standard processes (or non-

enforcement of the processes) has resulted in biased, unchecked decisions by staff at

various levels of child welfare agencies and courts.  This was perceived as a larger barrier

by the urban county participants.

Urban County participants felt that staff make decisions without enough information

about the cases, and use their subjective bias towards the cases and families to make

decisions that are not supported by the facts.  As one participant from the urban county

stated, *"there have been many inappropriate removals in the first place, and maybe they*

*(social workers) should have more consultations with their supervisors."*  Many of the

crucial decisions are based on *"knee jerk reactions,"* and *"there is no consistency amongst*

*workers and no enforcement of the standards."*  Other participants from the urban county

stated that *"workers are very subjective and staff/attorneys make decisions based on*

*personal values."*  When *"a kid is at risk of being removed at what point should agency*

*intervene, how do we know when is the right time to intervene?"*  As one urban county

participant stated *"different case workers have different ideas about when kids are*

*emotionally troubled, and systems such as CASI (Children and Adolescents Screening*

*Inventory) tools can help better standardize the process."*

*Accountability* was perceived by the urban county participants as a problem in the process of securing permanency for children. The participants felt that holding families accountable to adhere to the timelines and completion of their plans was not adhered to, therefore resulting in unnecessary delays in the process of reunification or obtaining permanent custody. Also, urban county participants emphasized the need for holding staff from various agencies that are part of the foster care network accountable for their work and decisions. The rural county participants had a more positive view. As one participant from the rural county stated, *"in this county the court holds families accountable by checking on the families and conducting mid-course interventions, as opposed to waiting till the end and filing extensions."*

**3) Inadequate community support for the cause was perceived as a factor in the foster care system's ability to secure permanency for children in out-of-home care.** The participants from both counties felt that there are not adequate community support for the issues confronting the foster care system, and that community support and engagement was necessary to address the needs of children in the foster care system. As one urban county participant stated *"we need to attack the problem in multiple fronts through better partnerships and better prevention efforts, and there are no magic bullets."*

Participants from both counties perceived that the foster care system and its participants (biological/custodial parents, foster parents, foster children and child welfare agencies) are portrayed negatively by the media, and as a result general community is not keen on getting involved and being part of the solution. In contrast to the negative attitude towards "foster care," the concept of adoption is viewed positively by the

community.  There is a need to educate the community in regards to the interconnectedness of the process.

The participants from both counties perceived communities in the rural county as more supportive.  As one rural county participant stated, *"communities have their own identities and level of their willingness to pitch-in is based on self-viewed identity and community."*  An urban county participant stated that *"in smaller counties the homogeneous nature of the population may contribute to the citizen's involvement with the children."*

Competing interests may also negatively impact community support.  One example of the lack of community support in the urban county as the result of competing interests is that the urban county in this study *"is the only large county in Ohio without a Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program."*  The CASA program is a volunteer program, which will decrease the waiting time for hearing cases, therefore expediting the process of permanency.  However, in the urban county which was studied for this research this program is not implemented.  According to a research participant, the CASA is opposed by the local legal establishment, as it may take cases away from the paid attorneys.

***Knowledge of the community*** regarding the significance of the issues confronted by the foster care system is limited and if the community was more aware of the issues facing the children, and consequences of not addressing the issue soon, they may be more supportive of the system.  This perception was shared by the participants from both counties and various organizations.  One rural county participant stated, *"We need to do a better job telling our story and getting the message out"* and to *"counter the negative*

*portrayal by the media by presenting the real picture of the issue." A rural county*

*participant stated, "Media plays a role in putting negative stories and messages out*

*there,"* and *"the community would be more supportive if they know more about the*

*problems."* Another urban county participant stated, *"adoption is viewed in a positive*

*light, and foster care is viewed negatively. We need to let the community know the fact*

*that most adoptions result from fostering."*

The community must be made aware of the problems associated with our foster care

system, if not addressed properly, can ultimately impact all of us. A rural county

participant associated with the juvenile justice system stated that "w*e need to*

*communicate this to the public that they will eventually come back to the neighborhood,*

*and when explaining this to the people who insist on placing kids in detention without*

*treatment programs their response to this problem will change and they will ask how they*

*can help."*

**4) Lack of knowledge and commitment was perceived as barriers to successful**

**permanency for children.** According to the participants' responses from both counties

the staff members were generally well trained, educated and competent. However, the

participants from the urban county felt that staff turnover, staff that are new to the field

and large caseloads were barriers to successful permanency. Lack of commitment by

some staff was perceived as a barrier by participants from both counties. This may be as

the result of personal values, indifference to the significance of the issue, feelings of

helplessness or the burnout factor. As one rural county participant stated, *"the social*

*workers working on my case were busy with their cell phones and playing games during*

*the family meetings."* Lack of knowledge was primarily associated with the biological

families in both counties.  According to one participant from the urban county *"anyone who wants to adopt should be a foster parent for many years."* Participants perceived the lack of adequate parenting skills by some biological and foster families prevents successful reunification with their children.  Parent education and skills development training was recommended by the participants.

**5) Inadequacy of the programs and services, as well as inability or unwillingness to access them, negatively impacts the timeline of the permanency process.**  Although this problem was discussed earlier as part of the inadequacy of financial resources section, it was emphasized by the participants and emerged as a separate theme through the interview and data analysis process.  While the participants from the rural county felt that there are not adequate programs and services in the community to help address the issues related to the foster children and securing permanency; the participants from the urban county generally felt that the bigger problem was a lack of knowledge and ability to access the services, and unwillingness of the families to utilize these services.  As stated by one of the urban county participants *"families are not knowledgeable about services, and are not savvy about obtaining them (i.e., mental health)."*  Another urban county participant stated that *"they should have services as part of the system to ensure they get the help, the services should be located together at the child welfare building."*

The comments by the rural county participants included: *"there are not enough counseling services and inpatient services, and no public transportation in this county which are barriers to permanency;" "there is a need for intensive in-home services;"* and *"we need more wraparound services in this community."*

***Lack of adequate transportation***, particularly in rural counties with little or no public transportation system, is considered a barrier to achieving permanency. As one of the participants from the rural county explained, *"the parents' ability to complete the services in their case plan (which is ordered by the courts or the child welfare agency) is not completely the parents' fault; sometimes they cannot access the services (no public transportation in this county)."* Respondents from both counties had similar negative views of assigning the responsibility of transportation to the social workers.

According to a respondent from the rural county, "*barriers include transportation - case workers have to transport kids and families, and do not have time to follow up on what they needed to do;"* and similarly, according to a respondent from the urban county "*the cuts in the agencies' staff have very negatively impacted the efforts. Child welfare agency had to cut staff and eliminate transportation for visitation, etc., and now the social workers have to handle the transportation duties along with more and more responsibilities. It limits their time of doing their work with the families."*

***Inadequate level of mental health services*** for both children and families (biological/custodial families, foster families, kinship caregivers, etc.) result in preventable child removals, disruptions and delays in the permanency process. Although this need was emphasized by participants from both counties, it appears to be a bigger problem in the rural county with a limited amount of psychiatrists and general mental health treatment services.

***Alcohol/substance abuse prevention and treatment*** was perceived by the participants from both urban and rural counties as a primary need in the community. The parents' abuse of alcohol, prescription drugs and illegal substance was viewed as a frequent cause

of removal of children from home, and a leading obstacle in reunification of children with their biological/custodial families. According to a rural county participant, *"the biggest barriers towards reunification are mental health and drug issues."*

*Parent education programs* were viewed as necessary in order to decrease the instances of child removal from home, as well as expediting the reunification process. Often families are in need of services that are much easier and cost-effective if provided upfront and prior to removal of children. Many parents, particularly teen parents, can benefit from educational programs and peer support groups, which will help them function as adequate parents and avoid getting tangled in the system.

*After school programs* were perceived by participants from both counties as inadequate or unaffordable by the families. Access to educational and recreational activities during the afterschool hours will reduce incidences of child disruptions, and contribute to successful permanency for children. A major problem emphasized was that the subsidies provided to foster families are not adequate to cover the high costs of after school or in school recreational and extracurricular activities. This is a problem for other families (i.e., biological/custodial families, kinship caregivers) as well.

**6) Foster Family Demographics may impact a foster care network's ability to secure permanency for children.** The foster family demographics explored for this study included the race/ethnicity, age, education level and the size of the household (number f other children in the home).

*Same race/ethnicity placement:* The research participants from both counties viewed placement of children with the same race/ethnicity families as an important factor in

securing successful permanency for children.  They viewed different race/ethnicity placement as an obstacle, particularly as the children get older.

The majority of participants from the urban county perceived same race/ethnicity placement as an important factor in securing permanency for children.  They perceived that placement of children with different race/ethnicity families as not helpful when planning successful permanency.  Only four out of 15 participants from the urban county (26%) felt that placement of children with different race/ethnicity families was not an important factor.

Similarly, the majority of respondents from the rural county felt that same race/ethnicity placement was a factor, and only five 5 out of 14 (35%) of the rural county participants felt that placement of children with different race ethnicity families was not an important factor.  One of the participants from the rural county chose not to comment.

*Age of foster parents:* When asking this question, there was no discussion of the definition of older caregivers and understanding of the concept of "older" was subjective. The policies of the child welfare agencies do not discriminate regarding placement of children based on caregivers' age.

Approximately half of the participants from the urban county (seven out of 15, or 47%) perceived the age of foster parents as a none-issue.  One participant viewed older foster parents as a positive factor, since they have more love and resources to give. Seven of the individuals (47% of the respondents) felt that placement of children with older families was a problem, primarily due to lack of energy, health issues and inability to handle unruly teenagers.

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However, the majority of respondents from the rural county perceived the age of families as a non-issue (10 out of 14, or 71%). One of the participants felt that placement of children with young families can be a problem, due to lack of adequate experience. Only two respondents (14%) felt that placement of children with older caregivers was a problem. The reasons, however, were similar to those of the respondents from the urban county (due to lack of energy, health issues and inability to handle unruly teenagers).

***Education level of foster parents:*** The level of education of caregivers as a factor in securing permanency for children was perceived very differently by participants of the urban and rural counties.

Seven out of 15 urban county respondents (47%) perceived the level of foster families' education as a non-issue. Three of the respondents (20%) viewed higher level of education as a negative factor. These respondents felt that more educated foster parents may have unreasonably high levels of expectation from the children. Five respondents (33%) perceived foster families' higher level of education as positive. The reasons given for their belief was that more educated families had more financial resources, better ability to access services, ability to provide help with school work and higher expectations from the children.

The overwhelming majority of respondents from the rural county (12 out of 14, or 85%) perceived foster families' education level as a non-issue. Three participants (15%) perceived foster families' higher level of education as a positive factor, for reasons similar to those of respondents from the urban county.

***Size of the household (number of other children in the home):*** Participants from both counties unanimously viewed the high number of children in the home as a barrier to

successful permanency.  The reasoning by the participants from both counties was similar and primarily included the special needs of the children, which cannot be effectively addressed if there are many other children in the home.  The exceptions were placements of large sibling groups in the same home, and if the families plan to adopt all of the children placed in their homes.

## FINDINGS THAT CONFIRM PRIOR RESEARCH RESULTS

**1) Lack of adequate financial resources was perceived by participants from both counties as a barrier to successful permanency.**  The participants from both counties perceived that there were not enough financial resources available to address the needs of the foster care networks in regards to securing permanency for children.  They perceived that various functions of the networks were negatively impacted by the lack of necessary financial resources.  The decrease in funding for foster care as the result of budget cuts at state and county levels was perceived as the reason for the problem.  As stated by one of the participants from the rural county, Ohio has substantially decreased its funding for foster care and adoption programs, and for example *"as the result of repeal of financial support for Adopt Ohio's program, the  burden was shifted to counties who are not able to cover the shortfall created."*  The areas and functions impacted negatively as the result of inadequate financial resources, as perceived by the research participants, included staffing levels at the network agencies, programs and services, reimbursements for foster families, support for adoption and kinship care.

*Inadequate staffing levels* resulting in large caseloads was one area of concern.  The case workers cannot allocate sufficient time for each family, and as one of the urban county participants stated *"there is a lack of social work staff to provide hands on coaching."*

Also, due to the limited time spent with the families, the social workers are not able to have a realistic picture of the situation when making decisions regarding disposition of their cases. Due to large caseloads and additional responsibilities such as transporting children and families, social workers and other support staff are not able to provide or link families with supportive services, which is resulting in failures to secure successful permanency for foster children. One of the urban county participants stated, network agency *"budgets do not allow hiring for vacant positions,"* and that there is a *"need for enough social work staff with small enough case load, and need for staff to focus on finding families for the children on a full-time basis."*

***Lack of adequate programs and services*** as the result of inadequate financial support from federal, state and county agencies was also perceived as a major barrier to permanency. One of the rural county participants cited the *"insufficient treatment resources due to state and county funding limitations"* as a problem in addressing the mental health and substance abuse treatment programs that are often obstacles in the way of family reunification. An urban county participant cited the example of discontinuation of a *"mentoring program for kinship that was successful, but money ran out."* Lack of adequate programs and services was also discussed earlier in this chapter, since it emerged as a separate theme during the interview process.

***Reimbursement for foster families from the county child welfare agencies may not be enough*** to care for children placed in their care. One of the Urban County participants summed up her view of this issue when stating that *"families routinely have to spend money out of their own pockets; the reimbursement is not enough especially when paying for day care or after-school programs; the day care vouchers do not pay for the entire*

*cost of day care, and some families prefer to take school age kids for this reason."* A rural county participant stated that *"increased financial reimbursements can impact quality of foster parents who are recruited,"* and that *"subsidy increase will contribute to staying home full time and be a foster parent."*

Although some of the participants perceived the financial reimbursements to the families as adequate, and that increasing it would attract the *"wrong"* kind of families, there was substantial emphasis on the need for increasing the reimbursements for foster families. By the wrong kind of families, some participants felt that by increasing reimbursements, the foster care system may attract families who are motivated only by money.

***Need for support for foster families who want to adopt children.*** According to one participant in the urban county *"government funding for adoption in Ohio is almost nothing, almost eliminated,"* and that *"adoption by foster families is discouraged as the financial support substantially decreases when they adopt the foster children*." The process of negotiations for adoption incentives was viewed as discrimination against families who want to adopt White children. Families who want to adopt can negotiate a subsidy (which starts at $0) with the child welfare agency; since there are a lower number of white children available for adoption and families compete for them, the families who are interested in adopting them have a weaker bargaining position during subsidy negotiations.

***Very little financial support for relatives (kinship care).*** Relatives who are willing and otherwise able to care for children through kinship care program are not supported financially. This may eliminate families who would be ideal caregivers. Although

extended family members are considered preferable to care for children, many are not able to do so without some financial support.  One foster parent from the urban county who also provides kinship care for her granddaughter stated that "*it was hard to understand why the system does not support her financially to care for her grandchildren the same way they pay her to care for a foster child.*  This issue was emphasized by participants from both counties and emerged as a separate theme, which was also discussed earlier in this chapter.

**2) There is a lack of cohesiveness (i.e., trust and communication) between various network components, and there is unnecessary red tape that contributes to the delay in securing permanency for children in out-of-home care.**  While participants from both counties viewed lack of cohesiveness amongst various network components as a barrier to successful permanency for children, this factor was viewed as more significant amongst the participants from the urban county.  The cohesiveness appears to be the single barrier to permanency in the urban county.  It was stated by the participants from the urban county that *"communication is not great, everyone is talking and no one is listening,"* and that there is *"discrepancy within upper management and reality of the situation of case workers who are in a real time mode."*

Although the lack of communication and trust was associated with the steps and interactions during the entire process of securing permanency, the issue of red tape was primarily associated with the process of obtaining permanent custody through the legal system.  According to one of the participants from the urban county *"a lot of time and energy is wasted in the court system.  Hearings are continued for no good reason.  If the judge is not able to attend the hearing, there is no communication before hand, and*

*attorneys and families show up to find out the case is being continued and there are many*

*other situations like this. A case can take two to three years to be heard, with five to six*

*continuances."* Other comments by participants from the urban county included *"a lot of*

*times things get hung up legal system when the case goes for permanent custody,"* and

"*sometimes the legal system lacks common sense and lacks the will to enforce the rules."*

As one foster family from the urban county who is in process of adopting a child

described, the adoption process is *"the biggest rollercoaster ride of your life."*

The cohesiveness issue appears to be more of a problem in the urban county.

According to one of the participants from the urban county *"in smaller counties it is*

*harder to get lost in the system, smaller counties are less tolerant of some things and will*

*intervene faster"* and that *"competency is different between smaller and larger counties.*

*Larger counties are too concerned about niceties. The difference between small and*

*large counties sometimes is local cohesiveness and trust v. rights and procedures."*

Another urban county participant stated, *"everyone is not on the same page,"* and *"a lot of*

*times the social worker responsible for the child does not have the time or foresight to*

*project the info to those who will be involved with the child's permanency. The social*

*worker responsible for the case must let everyone know who the therapist, Guardian Ad*

*Litem (A volunteer guardian appointed by the court to represent the interests of the*

*child), and the extended family members are."*

According to one of the participants from the rural county *"there is tremendous*

*collaboration on all levels of agencies locally, and workers and administrators know*

*each other and have no problem calling. The Families and Children First Council*

*(FCFC) coordinates activities at a very high level, and informally resolves many*

*problems. The size of the county makes personal collaborations more possible."* A participant from the urban county also elaborated on the issue by stating that *"too much formality sometimes presents barriers, and when getting to know each other the informal approach makes things move quicker and in a non-threatening way."* One of the rural county participants stated, *"larger counties are like assembly lines, and hearings are held frequently with no discussion on cause of failures."*

Lack of adequate communication with the foster families, and lack of communication and collaboration between foster families and biological families, was perceived by participants from both counties as a key barrier to successful permanency for children. Foster families can be a very valuable asset or a major obstacle in the way of achieving permanency. Foster families are in a unique position to influence the process due to their relationship with children and social workers. Foster families' relationships with the biological/custodial families need to be cultivated through building trust and providing opportunities for positive communication.

It is perceived by one urban county participant that the *"foster families' voice is not valued, although they are the key players."* Another urban county participant stated, *"it's important for the foster families to be a part of the whole process,"* and that *"if foster families are not in the loop it can create misunderstandings and problems."* Foster families can play an important role in the process of family reunification. According to a rural county participant, *"If the foster family understands the realities between the child and biological/custodial families, they are better able to help the process of reunification."*

According to the participants from both counties "when there is good communication between foster parents and biological parents it works well for permanency," and that "the big issue is the divide between foster families and biological/custodial families, and foster families need to be part of the cure and not sabotage."  Foster families need to be part of the case plan and be included in all meetings and permanency planning.

***Existence of red tape*** and unwillingness to adhere to the timelines was also perceived as a primary barrier to permanency.  As a result, according to a participant from the urban county *"biological families manipulate the system – multiple continuances of permanent custody hearings can take up to five years."*  Another example of red tape (by an urban county participant), which contributes to the lack of network cohesiveness is that *"a public defender who is representing the families cannot directly communicate with the child welfare agency social workers without the presence of the prosecutor.  He/she must go through other staff to have them contact the child welfare agency social worker as in-between if the public defended needs to obtain information regarding the case.  But, the public defender is able to communicate directly with the child welfare agency when a public defender represents only the child."*

Privacy rules of each network agency also appear to contribute to the red tape and are barriers to streamlined communication and cohesiveness between the agencies.  One of the participants from the urban county stated that *"staff from network agencies would communicate and collaborate more effectively, if there were cross training opportunities for staff.  Getting to know each other's roles will contribute to more effective and seamless communication process."*

The perception among the urban county participants was that Ohio is a strong pro family reunification state, which also contributed to the red tape by delaying the process of obtaining permanent custody and adoptions.  The perception was that the Ohio legislation and the courts focus on family's rights above the well being of the children.  This overrides the 12- month limit for biological/custodial families to comply with their plans or give up custody of their children.  They continue to receive additional chances, which could delay the process.  A problem that can be caused by this is issue, according to an urban county participant, is that *"the child welfare agency looks at the family as priority and takes kids away that have already been attached to foster parents."*  The strong focus on reunification also impacts the safety of the children as there is a push for reunification with families too soon and before they are ready to take their children back.  There was a perception that children are reunified with their families prior to resolving the issues that have resulted in their removal (i.e., parent substance abuse, parenting skills, anger issues).

**3) Kinship care should be encouraged through providing necessary support to the extended family members who are willing and otherwise able to care for children.** Although extended family members are preferable to strangers (all things being equal) when it comes to placement of children in out-of-home care, kinship care givers are not reimbursed for their efforts on the same level as the foster families.  There is the perception amongst participants from both counties that the extended family members are made to feel guilty in taking in family members' children and care for them without any financial support from the child welfare agency.

The problem is that many extended families that are willing and otherwise able to provide kinship care cannot afford it. There are instances when the kinship care givers send the children back to the care of child welfare agency, because they cannot afford caring for them financially. However, in these cases the child welfare agency places these children with foster families and pays the foster families to care for the children. A participant from the urban county stated, *"kinship care should be compensated like foster care because they are doing the same thing and most can't afford it without financial help."* A participant from the rural county summed up the problem as *"I do not believe that Ohio does a very good job at making it financially feasible for relatives who take legal custody. I do believe that increased financial payments would increase the chances of successful permanency. While Ohio does have some bare bones kinship programs, sadly, the state has not taken advantage of several federal programs which would increase the financial support for kinship programs."*

### *Chapter Summary*

Chapter four provided detailed information regarding the findings from the study. The next chapter will look at the findings in terms of their implications for the foster care network agencies and other community stakeholders, as well as discussion of findings in relation to other research regarding study of networks and foster care systems. Possible theories will also be discussed in the next chapter, along with recommendations for future research in this area.

# CHAPTER 5

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Introduction*

This research explored the factors that may explain the variations in the effectiveness of

foster care networks in regards to securing permanency for children in an urban county

and a rural county in Ohio (based on perceptions of stakeholders associated with these

networks).  As the result of exposure to substantial input from these key stakeholders, as

well as related literature, this researcher was able to explore not only the perceived

differences between the foster care networks, but to also gain an understanding of the

relationships between network organizations and the general issues related to the field.

This provided the opportunity to make key recommendations for practitioners and

propose suggestions for theory formulation and testing, which will help improve

permanency opportunities for our foster children.

From the researcher's experience in the field, it appeared that the foster care networks

in rural counties were generally more successful in regards to securing permanency than

those in urban counties.  This was confirmed by comparing the data for permanency

indicators for 20 counties (10 rural and 10 urban) in the following categories: 1) the

percentage of children who are reunified with their families in less than 12 months after

removal from home; 2) the number of days children remain in out of home placement; and 3) the number of days it takes for adoption finalization after obtaining permanent custody. An analysis of the available descriptive data from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) for the past several years confirmed that the foster care networks in rural counties on average are more successful in securing permanency for children than the networks in urban counties. This data is described in detail in chapter two.

This researcher became interested in identifying the factors that contributed to the variations between the networks in the rural and urban counties, and felt that this dissertation research would be an ideal opportunity to satisfy my curiosity. Two counties (one urban and one rural) were selected for in-depth research for the purpose of identifying potential factors that may contribute to variations in network effectiveness. It is this researcher's belief that the input in this regard can be best provided by the stakeholders from the networks being studied. Therefore the researcher designed the study to attempt find the answers accordingly. In-depth field interviews were conducted to explore perceptions of 30 network stakeholders (15 from each county) that included staff from the child welfare agencies, the juvenile courts, private foster care agencies and foster families. The research questions for this study were:

1. Do perceptions about the availability of adequate financial resources as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

2. Do perceptions about network cohesiveness as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

3. Do perceptions about community participation/support as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

4. Do perceptions about the stakeholder knowledge/competency as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

5. Do perceptions about foster parent demographic characteristics as a factor in determining foster care network effectiveness differ among urban and rural county stakeholders?

6. What other factors are perceived as significant in determining foster care network effectiveness among urban and rural county stakeholders?

### *Summary of Study*

Following in-depth field interviews with the 30 research participants who were selected through a random purposeful sampling strategy, the data obtained was analyzed through the grounded theory research method's coding process. The research resulted in several findings, which were described in detail in chapter four. This chapter will summarize the findings in relation to the information from the existing literature. Also, the findings will be discussed in regards to their implications for the practitioners in the field of foster care.

*Summary of the Findings*

This research started with a number of intervening variables which were identified from literature and from the experience in the field of foster care. These variables included financial resources, network cohesiveness, knowledge and competency of network components, community/citizen participation and support. In addition to the findings pertaining to the intervening variables, a number of other themes emerged from the study which led to additional findings. The research findings are summarized here and presented as either new findings or findings that confirmed results of previous studies.

**Proactive approach (new finding)-** Addressing the crisis situations encountered by families through higher emphasis on prevention activities will reduce the number of children removed from homes, ultimately resulting in reduction in the extent of the problem.

Intervention by social workers to address the needs of the child and families will reduce the frequency of removal of the child from home, and upfront matching of the children with foster families/other caregivers is a key determinant of the frequency of disruptions and success of permanency for children. For example, one study found that children who were removed from their homes were more likely to be homeless than children whose families received services from the child welfare system (through a proactive approach in addressing the problems) but where the child remained at home (Howard & Berzin, 2011).

**Discretionary Powers (new finding) -** Exercise of discretionary powers by stakeholders in the foster care networks are viewed as problematic, particularly in the urban county with a much larger network. There appears to be subjective decisions at various levels of

agencies without any systematic control and accountability. Where laws and regulations are not clear and there are not standardized processes in place (or are not enforced) staff have to make judgment calls frequently, which may not be oriented towards public good. There are unrealistic assumptions that people are making the right decisions.

Exercise of discretionary powers without accountability can negatively impact other areas of network. The factors that are responsible for foster care network effectiveness are not isolated and relate to and influence each other. The lack of accountability (or perception of it by network stakeholders) can undermine the trust of network stakeholders towards one another and towards the overall functions of network agencies. This may negatively impact the network cohesiveness and lead to barriers in the way of securing permanency for children.

One remedy for the problem of authority without accountability is to encourage more active citizen participation. One of the benefits of the ongoing citizen participation is that it helps develop trust between the community and the networks. It also reduces the incidences of abuse of discretionary powers as it forces the stakeholders to be accountable to active and concerned groups of community citizens. Citizen participation is a mechanism to ensure accountability on the part of administrators by placing demands on public agencies. Citizens know what it is that the community needs and to ensure accountability "public participation employed as a device to ensure correspondence between the actions of civil servants and the wishes of people" has a long history (Denhardt, 1997, p.121).

The issue of discretionary powers or authority without accountability in the network literature is understudied, and it is non-existent in the area of foster care. This topic

needs to be researched to a great extent, since it can impact the effectiveness, and perhaps the integrity of the networks.

**Community support/citizen participation (new finding)-** The participants from both counties felt that there are not adequate community support/citizen participation for the issues confronting the foster care system, and that community support and engagement was necessary to address the needs of children in the foster care system. However, the lack of community support/citizen participation was perceived as a bigger barrier to permanency by the urban county stakeholders. The communities should not take this support as a given, and must work towards earning the support of the community. This can be best accomplished by educating the community regarding the problems facing the networks, and how they can be a part of the solution. More importantly, citizens must be involved in the process on a regular basis through serving on committees, attending meetings or given an advocacy role. If they are not involved on an ongoing basis (i.e., approaching them only during fundraising drives), it is likely that they will lose interest.

Although the role of community/citizen participation and support in regards to the effectiveness of the networks has not been researched specifically in network literature, the importance of community/citizen participation and support in addressing social issues has been discussed widely in the literature. The impact of community/citizen participation can be seen in the roles of settlement workers in Chicago communities in early 1900's towards the betterment of their communities (Stivers, 2000). The advocacy by the community settlement workers to address community problems is a great example of how the community can, and should, mobilize to addresses social issues such as permanency for foster children. "The settlement workers wanted to improve the

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conditions of poor people's lives by getting governments to put in place new services and programs….. in a manner that would rouse public opinion and generate demand for improvements in the lives of city residents." (Stivers, 2000, p. 96). And according to King and Stivers "working with citizens usually contributes to the successful completion of agency work" (King & Stivers, 1988, p.75). The importance of citizen participation in resolving community problems was also addressed by Spiegel's work (1968), which states that citizen participation is the process that can meaningfully tie social programs to people (Spiegel, 1968).

Research participants from both counties perceived that the foster care systems are portrayed by the media in a negative manner and community is not aware of the real issues confronted by the system. Participants felt that if the community citizens were aware of the issues and had a realistic understanding of the foster care system's contributions to children and families, they would be more apt to participate and support the system and its causes. Existing literature supports this perception that knowledge of the community problems and a structure that would allow citizen involvement would encourage more community/citizen participation and support. Literature states that citizens want to make a difference in their communities, but may not know how to participate or there are barriers to participation (Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999). King & Stivers also found that administrators, activists, and citizens alike, agreed that participation is necessary and desirable, but the main problem is the way it is currently practiced and framed, which does not work (King & Stivers, 1998).

**Knowledge and competency (new finding) -** According to the participants' responses from both counties the staff were generally well trained, educated and competent.

However, as they stated "more training is always good." The importance of staff training was, however, emphasized in the Evan B, Donaldson Adoption Institute's research through a recommendation that we should "better train, supervise and support child welfare workers to achieve permanency" (Howard & Berzin, 2011). Studies also suggest that some attitudes – based on skepticism about achieving permanency for older youth – continue to undermine progress. Workers should be educated about the importance of permanency, successful strategies to achieve it, and the impact of youths' trauma experiences and developmental needs on these efforts (Howard & Berzin, 2011). Based on the perceptions of participants in this study, the need for training and skills development for the families was a larger issue than the need for training of staff. Also, research participants from both counties perceived that there was a lack of commitment amongst some staff.

**Need for programs and services (new finding)-** Since the network and foster care literature do not have much information on the impact of community-based programs and services on securing permanency for foster children, this finding will be labeled as a new finding, particularly as it pertains to securing permanency for foster children. As the result of overwhelming emphasis by research participants from both the rural and urban counties on the issue of availability and accessibility of programs and services, this issue emerged as a theme and a finding. Based on the results of this research, availability and accessibility of supportive services in the community are an important factor for securing permanency for foster children. This finding is supported by recommendation from an article which "proposes that foster families need more support to keep children safe and help them overcome the effects of their maltreatment" (Barth, 2001).

**Demographic Characteristics of Foster Families (new finding) -** Although a large

number of research participants viewed a caring family and love and support more

important than any demographic characteristics of the caregivers (race/ethnicity, age,

number of children in the home and education level), however, there were significant

input regarding the importance of some foster parent demographics in relation to securing

permanency for children.

When possible, and all things being equal, it is beneficial to place children with

families of same race/ethnicity.

The literature does not include studies regarding the relationship between foster family

demographics and the success of foster care networks in securing permanency for

children. The overall network literature also appears to have excluded this topic from

their various network effective studies. This topic should be researched extensively,

since it appears to be perceived by the stakeholders in the field of foster care as a

potentially determining factor in effectiveness of networks.

**Financial Resources (confirmation of prior research results) -** The participants from

both counties perceived that there were not enough financial resources available to

address the needs of the foster care networks in regards to securing permanency for

children. They perceived that various functions of the networks were negatively

impacted by the lack of necessary financial resources. The decrease in funding for foster

care as the result of budget cuts at state and county levels was perceived as the reason for

the problem. This finding is in line with the finding from the comparison study of mental

health networks in four cities by Provan & Millward (1995), which concluded that

financial resources played an important part in effectiveness of networks, and the success

of one of the networks (in the city of Providence, RI) was the result of better financial support.

The research participants stated that adopting children may be a disincentive at times, as there appears to be penalties for moving from fostering to adoption. This perception was confirmed by research results from a Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute study regarding policy and practice perspective titled "Never Too Old: Achieving Permanency And Sustaining Connections For Older Youth In Foster Care" (Howard & Berzin, 2011). It states that there are systemic incentives for keeping children in foster care rather than moving them into permanent adoptive. "For example, while a range of federal and state programs offer college tuition waivers and scholarships to youth who have been in foster care, some are limited to teens who are still in foster care when they reach the age of majority. In addition, it is also difficult for adoptive parents to get support for residential treatment for their children, while such access would be provided if the youth remained in foster care (Howard, Smith & Oppenheim, 2002).

**Cohesiveness (confirmation of prior research results)-** The research participants from the urban county network perceived the lack of communication and trust between foster families, biological/ custodial families, the courts and as a major barrier to securing permanency for children. This finding supports the existing literature. Trust is an indicator of network cohesiveness, and it is essential to maintain trust in a participant shared network (Provan & Kenis, 2008). In larger networks, where there are a large number of network stakeholders, the trust is difficult to build and maintain. People tend to trust who they know, and it is easier to get to know all or most of the stakeholders in smaller networks such as foster care network in a smaller rural county. In a sizeable

complex network such as the foster care network in a large urban county, it is an impossible task for everyone to get to know one another. Therefore it is understandable that the issue of lack of cohesiveness due to the trust foster is perceived as a bigger problem by participants from the urban county. The importance of trust in effectiveness of networks is also, emphasized by Adler & Kowan who view trust as a source of social capital, which is essential to maintain the networks and keep them functioning properly (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

They perceived the lack of inclusion of foster families in the process of planning and implementation of permanency plans and processes as a barrier to permanency. This finding is also aligned with the recommendation included in a 2011 Child Welfare Information Gateway article, titled "Family Reunification: What the Evidence Shows," which states that "foster parents may facilitate family reunification through both the mentoring of the birth parents and the support of their visitation." (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011).

The development of a positive relationship between the foster and birth parents may allow children to avoid the stress of divided loyalties and position foster parents to play a supportive role after reunification. However, when selecting foster parents to work with birth parents, agencies should consider their experience, maturity, communication skills, their ability to handle these multiple roles, and the possible need for additional training" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011).

The higher integration and interaction level of network agencies will also contribute to network cohesiveness. Provan & Milward's (1995) work which looks at the relationship between network effectiveness and integration across full networks. Their findings suggest that networks are more effective with regard to client outcomes if integration occurs at the

clique, or sub-network, level instead of among the full network. Furthermore, networks, involving health and human services agencies (i.e., foster care networks), will be more effective in achieving client outcomes if "clique integration" involves multiple and overlapping links at the client level. The effectiveness of rural network because of the informal relationships is a good example of how the clique integration (as an indicator of cohesiveness) impacts effectiveness of the network.

In a study of rural health networks, Moscovice, Christianson, & Wellever (1995) also view integration between network organizations as beneficial to the success and effectiveness of the networks. They define integration based on how the independent organizations within a network function as a single unit through shared decision making, the contribution of resources, and sacrifice of organizational autonomy. Trust amongst organizations, which is another contributing factor to network cohesiveness, is identified by Provan & Kenis (1998) as an important factor in effectiveness of shared participant-governed networks (such as a foster care network).

Another factor that emerged from this study was the extent of discretionary powers exercised by the stakeholders in the foster care network (which was viewed as biased and self-serving by some network stakeholders, and impacts the degree of cohesiveness elements such as trust, communication and collaboration). According to the research participants, staff at various levels of organizations, from judges to social workers, are allowed to make subjective and biased decisions throughout the process, from a decision to remove a child from home to when and with whom a child is placed.

Lack of accountability by various network participants (including foster families) was perceived as a problem in the process of securing permanency for children. The participants felt that holding families accountable to adhere to the timelines and

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completion of their plans was not adhered to, therefore resulting in unnecessary delays in the process of reunification or obtaining permanent custody.  Also, participants emphasized the need for holding staff from various network agencies accountable for their work and decisions.

While participants from both counties viewed lack of cohesiveness amongst various network components as a barrier to successful permanency for children, this factor was viewed as more significant among the participants from the urban county compared to those from the rural county.  This was perceived to be partially a result of the larger size of the urban county's foster care network.

**Kinship care (confirmation of prior research results) -** The research participants' perception regarding the importance of kinship care and support for kinship caregivers was confirmed by other studies.  The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute research titled "Never Too Old: Achieving Permanency And Sustaining Connections For Older Youth In Foster Care (Howard & Berzin, 2011) provides strong support for this view, as it cites the following studies that have found that kin placements are much more stable than those with non-kin: Barth, Courtney, Berrick & Alpert, 1994; and Berrick, 1998; Testa, 1997 (Howard & Berzin, 2011).

Research indicates that children initially placed in foster care with relatives had significantly fewer placements than their peers who are placed with non-kin; in fact 85 percent of those initially placed with kin remained there, and far fewer of those who were subsequently reunified with biological/foster families returned to foster care (Howard & Berzin, 2011).

The research participants' perception regarding the need for financial support of kinship families is also supported with other research, which suggests that rates of disruption in kinship families are tied to the level of financial support and the availability of post-placement services. There are few interruptions in placement with kinship caregivers when financial subsidies and supportive services are available, where as there are more disruptions without such support (Testa, 2004).

A recommendation from the research cited earlier is that "The protective aspects of kinship care should not be offset by economic disadvantages, so we should examine how to better meet the needs of low-income kin caregivers" (Howard & Berzin, 2011). Although extended family members are preferable to strangers (all things being equal) when it comes to placing the children, kinship care givers are not reimbursed for their efforts similar to the foster families. The problem is that many extended families who are willing and otherwise able to provide kinship care cannot afford it. There are instances when the kinship care givers send the children back to the child welfare agency because they cannot afford caring for them financially, and the child welfare agency places these children with foster families and pays the foster families to care for the children.

### *Implications for Theory and Practice*

The findings from this study provided contributions to network effectiveness literature, and also resulted in valuable input for practitioners in the field of foster care.

### **Possible Theories**

Contributions to possible theories were developed regarding the factors which may impact network effectiveness. Some of the information obtained through this research

project is suggestive of possible theories that can be formulated and tested, which include:

1) Community participation and support may be a significant factor in success of networks that address complex social issues.  Community citizens can directly contribute time and financial support, and also serve as advocates to generate additional support from the legislation.

2) Exercise of discretionary powers by members of network organizations can impact the effectiveness of the entire network.  This can be controlled through development and enforcement of standards for all procedures, as well as through citizen participation and monitoring.

3) Adequate financial support contributes to effectiveness of a network.  This supports findings of previous study (Provan & Milward, 1995).  Lack of adequate financial resources has a domino effect that negatively impacts the functions of each organization within the network, resulting in their ability to produce successful client outcome.

4) Communication and collaboration between network agencies and stakeholders is a significant factor in determining effectiveness of a network.  This appears to be the single best determinant factor for explaining the variations in effectiveness between rural and urban counties in regards to successful and timely permanency for children, as perceived by the network stakeholders.

5) When large networks are ineffective due to the large number of stakeholders and large geographical areas, they should be divided into smaller networks if possible. This is an alternative approach to the Provan & Kenis (2008), who suggest that the mode of network governance should change from participatory to lead organization.  The nature

of foster care networks appear to be such that the participatory mode of governance is most conducive, and perhaps breaking down larger networks into smaller similar networks might be a better approach. In the case of the foster care network in a large urban county, there can be a number of autonomous networks that would focus on certain geographical location of the county, which would allow for more cohesive and better manageable networks similar to some of the characteristics of rural county networks.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The results of this study also contributed substantial information and recommendations for the practitioners in the field of foster care. The recommendations are primarily based on the input from the foster care network stakeholders who participated in this study, as well as information from the related research. This researcher considers the input from the study participants very valuable, since they as a group have a well-rounded knowledge of the network. The following are recommendations for practice:

**Recommendation 1**: Encourage kinship care by providing financial assistance and supportive services to the children's relatives who are willing and otherwise able to care for them. Many of these potential kinship caregivers (i.e., grandparents, aunts and uncles) may not have the financial capacity to care for the children without help from the child welfare agencies. They should also be provided with access to supportive services in the community (i.e., mental health) and other programs such as respite care that is available to foster families. There was a consensus amongst research participants that if the child welfare agencies are able to provide foster families who are strangers to the children with placement subsidies, then why it cannot be done for the relatives? The

added benefit is that children placed with relatives will have better outcomes and better chances of achieving permanency as evident by various research results discussed earlier.

**Recommendation 2:** Reduce the opportunities for biased decisions by agency staff through development and/or enforcement of standardized procedures and policies. When there are no clear policies or the policies are not enforced, opportunities are provided by staff from various network organizations to make decisions based on their own subjective beliefs, which may contradict the facts of the cases and may not support the process of securing permanency for children. This also undermines the integrity of the system, as some stakeholders may not see the rules as relevant and lose faith in the system.

**Recommendation 3:** Ensure involvement by foster families in all phases of permanency planning, and utilize them as a resource to help biological/custodial families reunite with the children. If the relationships between the foster families and biological/custodial families are not managed properly, it can lead to lack of trust and obstacles towards family reunification. On the other hand, foster families can be utilized as mentors to help biological/custodial families regain custody of their children.

**Recommendation 4:** Network stakeholders must adhere to the established processes and procedures. The perception among network participants is that the process takes too long for unnecessary and trivial reasons (i.e., forgetting to invite a stakeholder to the hearing, or cancelling the hearings unnecessarily) which postpones the hearings for several months at a time. In the meantime, the children are in a limbo, and the longer they remain in out-of-home care their chances for permanency diminishes. All network stakeholders should be aware of this important factor and strive to secure permanency for children in the shortest time possible.

**Recommendation 5:** Agencies should take a proactive approach to identify and address

the families' issues, before it becomes necessary to remove a child from home. It is

possible that many families are overwhelmed and suffer from mental health issues,

financial difficulties and lack of necessary parenting skills, which can lead to child abuse

and neglect and removal of children from home. If these families are provided with the

resources and skills in a timely manner it may prevent the removal of children, which

results in substantial financial and human costs. Also, if a child is removed from home,

there must be an accurate assessment of the child's needs and accurate upfront matching

with foster families to avoid disruptions, which negatively impact the child's chances for

permanency. Prior to child reunification with the family, the readiness of the family must

be confirmed through careful assessments, and continue to provide supportive services

during post reunification in order to reduce the possibility of the child returning to the

system. This issue was emphasized by the respondents from both counties.


### *Suggestions for Future Research*

The limitations of this study (described in the Limitations Section above) should be

addressed in any future research in this area. A larger number of counties, randomly

selected, should be studied and additional foster care network organizations should be

included in the study. In addition, future research should further explore the significance

of community participation and support in network governance and its effectiveness, to

successfully address complex social problems. The research should also include

longitudinal studies of the children and families involved with the foster care systems,

and longitudinal research on the impact of foster parent demographics on child permanency.

## *Conclusion*

I cannot think of any other segment of our population that is as vulnerable as the children who have been removed from their homes.  These children are being torn away from their families, friends, schools and communities with the aim of being protected against physical and emotional abuse at home.  To accomplish this aim, and to minimize the trauma experienced by these children, we need a network of agencies to work together seamlessly and selflessly.  Although there have been recent advances in the study of networks, there does not appear to be a body of knowledge in regards to the foster care networks.  If we do not have effective foster care networks to help these abused, neglected and traumatized children, then the emotional trauma will continue while they are in out-of-home placements, and will last through their adulthood.  One area of the foster care system that exasperates the experience of trauma by these children is the lack of a stable and permanent place where these children can call home and experience a sense of belonging, connection and love.

The problems associated with foster children, particularly those aging out of the system without having had permanency and its long-term impact has been documented. Multiple studies show that a high percentage of these youth will face difficulties in early adulthood as they struggle with poor educational attainment, insufficient employment and low income, inadequate housing, early parenthood, involvement with the criminal justice system, substance abuse, and physical and mental health problems.  Research and

experience teach us that permanent, emotionally sustaining and committed relationships are imperative for youth to reach self-sufficiency and to thrive in early adulthood, yet many young people leave care without any such relationships.

The following information was retrieved from the research conducted by Evan B. Donaldson of the Adoption Institute which provides information regarding a wide range of problems by foster children as the leave the system:

- Former foster children have difficulties maintaining relationships because of the attachment losses they suffered during in and out of their family home and foster homes.

- Only 28 percent of former foster youth enrolled in college by age 21, as compared to almost 70 percent of the general population.

- Jobless rates rise above the national average for their age group and, even when working, they report tentative employment.

- According to various studies, the rates of homelessness for former foster parents range from 12 percent-49 percent.

- More than 30 percent of females aging out of care became pregnant by age 17 or 18, compared with fewer than 15 percent of comparison youth.

- More than 40 percent of former foster children have been in trouble with the law and have spent time in jail following emancipation.

- Former foster children often lack health insurance, with studies showing 30 percent-50 percent without coverage, compared to 18 percent of peers in the general population.

- According to one study, 61 percent of older youth in the foster care system had a psychiatric disorder in their lifetime.

- Substance abuse rates are also higher for former foster children, with some studies estimating.

- More than 50 percent of former foster children have problems with.

 (Howard & Berzin, 2011).

The issue of permanency has been recognized as a major social problem and attention is being given to this area.  For example the federal government has allocated funding through grant programs to further study and address this issue.  However, this funding is on a very limited basis and is distributed through a competitive process, which means only a few communities in the country will have the opportunity to address this growing and complex national problem on a pilot basis.  Nevertheless, the positive aspect is that the significance of the permanency issue is recognized by the policy makers on the national level, and is being addressed.

These grants (most recent in September 2012) are to support Kinship Navigation programs: projects that will demonstrate the effectiveness of Kinship Navigator programs in supporting connections between children  and their extended family members, and in helping them and their kinship caregivers identify and access appropriate services to achieve and sustain permanency; Family Finding and Family Group Decision-Making programs: projects that will demonstrate the effectiveness of family finding programs and related services; and Residential Programs for Families: projects that will expand the availability of effective, comprehensive, residential treatment services for families involved with  the child welfare system.  These projects

will provide services strategically to parents and their children with the aim of stabilizing, strengthening, preserving and reuniting families (National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, 2012).

I would like to add personal perspective in here regarding my direct and indirect experience of this issue, which contributed to my decision on this dissertation topic. As the result of my experience and intimate knowledge of the problem, I had to be very careful not to allow any personal or professional bias impact the research process and I believe I was disciplined in this regard during the entire process. I traveled to the United States from Iran when I was 16 years old. My family sent me here on an exposure trip and to finish high school in the U.S. The trip was expected to be temporary and I was to live with a family here and to remain in constant contact with my family in Iran.

However, after a short time following my arrival in the U.S., the political landscape in Iran drastically changed which directly impacted me financially, socially, and emotionally. My contact with my family in Iran was lost for a long period of time and my placement with families here was disrupted a number of times. As I was close to developing a relationship and connection with a family, I was moved to another home. I still do not know the reasoning behind the disruptions, but I still remember the sadness and emotional turmoil I experienced every time I had to move.

In my most recent job with a foster care/adoption agency, I became very familiar with the problems associated with our foster care systems nationwide. In my opinion, the most common and difficult aspect of the system experienced by the children is the frequent disruptions and lack of children's connection with a place they can call home. The staff members from the agencies responsible for caring for foster children are

overwhelmed with large caseloads and increasing responsibilities, due to budget cuts at state and local levels. They are continuously reacting to crisis situations and do not have the time and resources to focus on permanency planning for these children.

Like any complex social problem, it takes a network approach or cross sector collaborations to address the problem of permanency in our foster care systems. The more effective the network, the more successful it would be in securing permanency for children. This researcher believes that the findings outlined in this study, the suggestions for possible theories which can be formulated and tested, implications for practice and suggestions for future research will contribute to improved effectiveness of networks in general, and the networks' success in securing permanency for foster children in particular.

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**Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

My name is Reza Khoramshahi (Ph.D. Candidate/student at Cleveland State University), and I am conducting interviews for my dissertation project. I am studying the factors that may contribute to more effective permanency outcome for foster children. My dissertation title is "**An Exploration of the Factors that Contribute to an Effective Foster Care Network in an Urban and Rural Setting."** This study is conducted by me (student) under the supervision of Dr. Mittie Jones, Department Chair, (faculty advisor) at Cleveland State University's Maxine Goodman Levine's College of Urban Affairs.

During the interview, you will be asked to share your thoughts regarding the impact of various factors (i.e. effectiveness of individual organizations, cohesiveness between organizations, financial resources and community support) on the permanency outcomes for foster children. Please feel free to expand on a particular topic or talk about any other topics you may consider important pertaining to securing permanency for foster children.

**Study Participant Agreement:**
I agree to participate in the above described study conducted by Dr. Mittie Jones (faculty supervisor) and Reza Khoramshahi (principal investigator) from Cleveland State University. I understand that the study is designed to gather information regarding factors that may contribute to more effective securing of permanency for foster children.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, I can withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide an explanation, I will not be penalized in any form for my decision not to participate, and I will not be paid for my participation.

I understand that my participation in this study does not involve any foreseeable risks beyond activities of daily living, and my participation may help enhance permanency for foster children.

I understand that my participation in this study involves being interviewed by Reza Khoramshahi, and the interview sessions will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Reza will take notes during the interview, and the interview will not be recorded.

I understand that I will not be identified by name in any reports using information provided by me during the interview sessions, and my confidentiality as a participant in this study will be secure. I understand that all information provided by me for this study will be securely held at the faculty supervisor's (Dr. Mittie Jones) office and destroyed upon compliance with requirements for data maintenance period of three years.

I understand that if I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at 216-687-3630.

Also if I have any questions about this study I can contact Reza Khoramshahi @330-201-3206 (rmkphd1@aol.com) and/or Dr. Mittie Jones @ 216-687-2000 (m.d.jones97@csuohio.edu).

I understand the explanation provided to me in regards to this study, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been provided with a copy of this consent form.

_____          _____
Participant's Signature                                       Date


_____          _____
Investigator's Signature                                       Date

**Family Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

My name is Reza Khoramshahi (Ph.D. Candidate/student at Cleveland State University), and I am conducting interviews for my dissertation project.  I am studying the factors that may contribute to more effective permanency outcome for foster children.   My dissertation title is "**An Exploration of the Factors that Contribute to an Effective Foster Care Network in an Urban and Rural Setting.**"  This study is conducted by me (student) under the supervision of Dr. Mittie Jones, Department Chair, (faculty advisor) at Cleveland State University's Maxine Goodman Levine's College of Urban Affairs.

During the interview, you will be asked to share your thoughts regarding the impact of various factors (i.e. effectiveness of individual organizations, cohesiveness between organizations, financial resources and community support) on the permanency outcomes for foster children.  Please feel free to expand on a particular topic or talk about any other topics you may consider important pertaining to securing permanency for foster children.

**Study Participant Agreement:**
I agree to participate in the above described study conducted by Dr. Mittie Jones (faculty supervisor) and Reza Khoramshahi (principal investigator) from Cleveland State University.  I understand that the study is designed to gather information regarding factors that may contribute to more effective securing of permanency for foster children.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, I can withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide an explanation, I will not be penalized in any form for my decision not to participate, and I will not be paid for my participation.  However, I understand that I will be given a $25 gift card in appreciation for my participation.

I understand that my participation in this study does not involve any foreseeable risks beyond activities of daily living, and my participation may help enhance permanency for foster children. I understand that my participation in this study involves being interviewed by Reza Khoramshahi, and the interview sessions will last approximately 60-90 minutes.  Reza will take notes during the interview, and the interview will not be recorded.

I understand that I will not be identified by name in any reports using information provided by me during the interview sessions, and my confidentiality as a participant in this study will be secure.  I understand that all information provided by me for this study will be securely held at the faculty advisor's (Dr. Mittie Jones) office and destroyed upon compliance with requirements for data maintenance period of three years.

I understand that if I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at 216-687-3630.

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I understand the explanation provided to me in regards to this study, and I agree to participate in this study.  I have been provided with a copy of this consent form.

_____              _____
Participant's Signature                                                          Date


_____              _____
Investigator's Signature                                                        Date

## DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION

Code number*: _____          Date: _____

Gender: _____          Ethnicity: _____

Education level: _____          Licensure, etc. _____

Occupation/position: _____          Length of employment: _____

Income: < $20,000_; $20,000-$30,000 _; $30,000-$40,000 __; $40,000-$50,000__; > $50,000 __

Age: 20-30 ___; 31-35 ___; 36-40 ___; 41-45 ___; 46-50 ___; 51-55 ___; 56-60 ___; 60+ ___

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*(Please elaborate on all your answers and add information, which you think is relevant)*

1) What does successful permanency for foster children mean to you?

2) How important is permanency?

3) What are the barriers to permanency?

4) How can we ensure successful permanency?

5) How would you rate the success of permanency efforts in your county?

6) What factors enable or help in securing successful permanency?

7) How easy is it for you to communicate with staff from child welfare agencies, courts, adoption/foster care agencies, foster families, biological/custodial families, and community volunteers (i.e. mentors)? How often do you communicate with the above components? Do you feel the level of communication is adequate? What are the success factors and barriers?

8) How important is the communication process between these components in securing successful permanency for foster children? Please elaborate on your experiences.

9) Are there adequate supportive services in the community to help effectively care for foster children (case management, crisis intervention, afterschool programs, family support groups, mentors, etc.)? What may be some examples of available or unavailable resources that may impact the lives of foster children and securing permanency for them?

10) Do you feel that the level of financial reimbursement to foster families is adequate? How would an increase in the amount help with securing successful permanency?

11) How would you describe the significance of "red tape" in regards to securing permanency for children? What are your experiences in this area?

12) Do you feel that there is adequate support for families who want to adopt foster children? Please elaborate.

13) Do you feel that there is adequate support for kinship programs? Please elaborate.

14) Do you feel that the community citizens/businesses/foundations are adequately supportive and involved in caring for foster children and helping with securing

permanency?  Is the general community aware of the significance of the issue?  Do you feel that if the community were more knowledgeable about the significance of this issue they would be more involved and supportive?

15)  Do you feel that organizations' staff, foster families and other stakeholders are adequately knowledgeable and trained to help secure permanency?  How would additional knowledge, training and other expertise help in this area?  Please elaborate.

16)  What percentage of staff in the agency are licensed professionals?

17)  What is the average length of employment for the existing staff in the agency?

18)  What are the training requirements and opportunities provided by the agency?

19)  Do you feel that the age of foster parents are important in securing permanency for children?  Please elaborate.

20)  Do you feel that placement of foster children with families of same race/ethnicity is important in regards to securing permanency for children?  Please elaborate.

21)  Do you feel that the number of other foster children and or/biological children in the home is important in regards to securing permanency for children?  Please elaborate.

22)  Do you feel that the education level of foster parents is important in securing permanency for children?  Please elaborate.

23)  Do you have any questions for me?

24)  Would you like to add anything?

25)  How would you describe your experience regarding your participation in this survey?

**Reza (Ray) Khoramshahi, Ph.D. Candidate**
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**Phone: 330-201-3206; Email: rkhoramshahi@csuohio.edu**

December 20, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a Ph.D. Candidate at Cleveland State University, and am working on my dissertation research project. My research project is titled "an exploration of the factors that contribute to an effective foster care network in an urban and rural setting," which aims to help improve the quality of life and chances of success for our foster children. The study is looking at various factors that may contribute to securing permanency (adoptions, kinship care, developing life-long connections, reduced rates of disruptions, etc.) for our foster children.

As part of the research project I would like to talk with current and former foster parents, as well as the biological/custodial parents whose children were placed in foster care (currently or in the past). As an individual who is intimately involved in the lives of our children who are placed in foster care, I believe that you are in a unique position to help explore and find what works and what needs to be changed in our foster care system. I need approximately 90 minutes of your time to meet with you and obtain your input. I respectfully ask that you give me a call or email me, so I can answer your questions and provide you with additional information in this regard. Please note that:

- Your participation and input is completely confidential
- Your name or any other information you provide will not be shared with anyone
- There are no risks associated with your participation
- Your participation and input can potentially contribute to improving the quality of life for many children
- This will be a one-time, 60-90 minute meeting
- The meeting will take place at a time that is convenient for you
- The meeting will take place at a safe, private and convenient location (which can also be chosen by you)
- Meeting with me to provide input is completely on a voluntary basis, and you are not obligated to answer any questions and can stop the meeting at any time
- You will be provided with a $25 Visa gift card as a token of my appreciation for your time and effort

I look forward to hearing from you, and to have the opportunity to provide you with additional information and answer any questions you may have. Please contact me at 330-201-3206 or email me at: rkhoramshahi@csuohio.edu.

Sincerely,


Reza Khoramshahi