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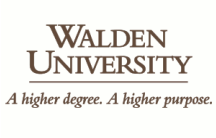

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College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Catherine O. Osilama

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Perceptions of Foster Care Providers' Implementation of the PSTSFA of 2014

by

Catherine O. Osilama

MBA, Salem State University, 2008

BA Ed, Edo State University, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Management and Leadership

Walden University

August 2018

Abstract

Youth in foster care encounter challenges during and after they transition from foster care to adulthood. To address these challenges and prepare these youth for transitioning into adulthood, U.S. Congress enacted the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (PSTSFA) in 2014. The problem, which has received little attention in research, concerns the challenges that the implementers of this policy encounter as they provide services to foster youth. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the challenges faced by foster care providers in their implementation of PSTSFA. Von Neumann and Morgenstern's game theory provided the theoretical framework on which this qualitative study was based. The central question explored and provided a better understanding of the perceived challenges that foster care providers face while implementing PSTSFA to foster youth between 13 and 17 years of age. The qualitative phenomenological study included online open-ended survey questions that were applied to obtain responses from 17 participants. Data were analyzed using the modified Van Kaam phenomenological analysis model. The results revealed that foster care providers face various challenges in their implementation of the law, including, but not limited, to training, communication and collaboration, code of silence, and heavy workloads. The implication for social change includes contributing to the dialogue on the challenges foster care providers face their implementation of PSTSFA, and formulating corrective measures that address the challenges. Because of the corrective measures, foster youth will acquire the required training and coping skills before transitioning from care to independence.

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Dedication

To my parents Cyril and Bridget Akhimien (KSM) for their love and support growing up.

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I am indebted to my children for their love and support through the whole process. And to my husband who was always there through it all, I say - thank you, I love you so much.

Most importantly, I want to thank God Almighty for His love, His mercy and grace, and for the strength He gives me each day.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

One of the duties of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is to protect children from abuse and neglect and to strengthen families. DCF, working on behalf of the states, removes children and youth from their families when they have reason to suspect abuse and/or neglect and provides temporary placements for them (Department of Health & Human Services, 2015). They uses their interpretation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 to reunite the children with their families. The states provide permanent placement for children for whom the re-unification with their families by DCF has failed (Adoption & Safe Families Act, 1997).

In arranging permanency plans, some children and youth are placed with adoptive families. However, those who are not placed with adoptive families live with unrelated foster parents in residential group homes, kinship care homes, congregate care residential facilities, or in supervised independent living facilities under the control and supervision of the state (Department of Health & Human Services, 2016). Children who are not adopted do not have the permanence and consistency of adopted or biological children as they transition from one foster home to another. They receive the education and training as specified in the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) of 1999, Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendment (PSSFA) of 2001, and Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (FCSIAA) of 2008, using financial allocations from U.S. Congress, but this does not replace the stability of a family.

Although these polices were enacted in 1999, 2001, and 2008, there has not been evidence that the policies changed the predicament of the foster youth when they

transitioned out of foster care. More than 50% of the youth who transitioned into adulthood were unemployed, 40% experienced homelessness, and the majority of them lived below poverty level (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Stott, 2012). They did not possess the training and family connection to depend on after they transitioned. Unlike the nonfoster youth who have families to go to for advice and guidance, the transitioned youth did not have family connentions to go to when they encountered challenges (Berzin, Singer, & Hokanson, 2014). They were not prepared to make adult decisions and instead made their decisions based on the limited choices that were available to them (Unrau, 2011).

As a way to alleviate these challenges and provide the foster youth with a normal life-style, comparative to their nonfoster counterparts, Congress enacted the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (PSTSFA) in 2014. The law requires youth who are 13 years and older to participate in the development of a transition plan to ensure successful and easy transitioning to adulthood. The providers were expected to receive training about sex trafficking and reporting instances when they suspected youth were trafficked. The youth were to participate in programs that were available to nonfoster youth but were not availablee to them because they were in foster care. As part of the law, Congress required the Secretary of Heath and Human Services to submit a report of the implementation of PSTSFA 2 years after enactment (PSTSFA, 2014).

In this research study, I explored and enriched knowledge about the implementation challenges associated with the foster care providers implementers of the PSTSFA. To enhance understanding of the challenges, providers narrated their

experiences with the implementation of the law as they provide services to foster youth between the ages of 13 and 17 years old. Foster care providers who narrated their experiences included foster parents, guardians ad litem (GAL), and social or case workers and managers. Although contacted, data were not obtained from court-appointed special advocates (CASAs).

Background of the Study

Foster care providers play a crucial role in the successful implentation of any foster care policy that Congress enacts. When youth transition from the foster care system, society expects them to make responsible decisions, live by specific societal norms, obtain postsecondary or trade school certificates, get jobs, and become productive members of the society (Pears, Heywood, Kim & Fisher, 2011). To achieve this goal, Section 101 of Subtitle A of PSTSFA, required state agencies to identify, document, and determine services for children and youth who were at risk of sex trafficking. In Section 102, Congress required state agencies to immediately report (within 24 hours) instances when youth were sex trafficked and to report total number of victims to the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS). In Sector 103, Congress instructed states to include Sex Trafficking Data in the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), and in Section 104, Congress required states to expeditiously locate any missing children and determine factors that contributed to their foster youth running away (PSTSFA, 2014).

In Sections 111 of Subtitle B of Title I of PSTSFA, Congress required states to implement reasonable and prudent parenting standards and to enable foster parents

tomake parental decision that maintain the health, safety, and best interest of the youth under their care. The decisions included youths' participation in extra curricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities. In this aspect, Congress expected foster parents to be trained on prudent parenting standards regarding age of developmentally appropriate activities, best practices, concerns of biological parents in relation to participation in activities and ensured appropriate liability for caregivers who approved the youths' participation. Congress provided funding under the Title IV-E beginning in 2020 for the purpose of supporting participation in age-appropriate activities until they they are 18 years of age.

To ensure implementation, Congress required states to provide an implementation plan after two years of the enactment of the policy (PSTSFA, 2014). Creating this policy was the first step toward ensuring that the youth in the foster care system acquired the necessary skills and experiences and were exposed to similar growth opportunites as their non-foster counterparts (Pokempner, Mordecai, Rosado, & Subrahmanyam, 2015). This policy is important because for the first time it addressed the growth level and skill set of the youth, and it required the youth to participate in the decisions and planning that affected their adulthood (Pears et al., 2011).

Role of PSTSFA of 2014

Youth in foster care were at an educational disadvantage because they did not have the guidance and consistency of nonfoster children. Furthermore, when they moved between foster homes, they lost any educational continuity they had acquired, and some dropped out of school (Pears et al., 2011). In addition to that, some of the youth

experienced poor school adjustment because of poor reading skills and behavioral adjustments and because of lack of coordination among service systems including the schools and the foster care system (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010; Pears et al., 2011). This lack of consistency and coordination among service systems along with inadequate training of professionals and care providers led to high dropout rates, legal challenges with the system, and incarcerations (Krebs, Pitcoff, & Shalof, 2013; Osgood et al., 2010). PSTSFA made provision for ensuring that the youth acquired the information that they need to succeed because it required states and the implementers to provide the youth with such information as part of their transition plan to successful adulthood.

Youth in foster care and those transitioning were often sexually exploited because they did not receive adequate protection from the foster care system, or they ran away from care. Research revealed that youth who transitioned from foster care often had a history of sexual exploitation and rape while they were in care. The rape was a form of transactional sex in exchange for money, food or other needs (Ahrens, Katon, McCarty, Richardson, & Courtney, 2012). Of the youth who transitioned, 42% to 45% of the females were either pregnant or were parents by the time they were aged 18 to 20 years old (Ramseyer Winter, Brandon-Friedman, & Ely, 2016). PSTSFA provided for strenghthening the entire foster care system by discouraging youth from succumbing to the temptation of sex trafficking. The law instructed the states and providers to track, identify, and protect children and youth who were at risk of being trafficked and to meet their needs (PSTSFA, 2014).

The policy removed any constraints that might prevent the foster youth from living and enjoying normalcy such as the nonfoster youth. *Normalcy* per this law referred to foster youths' ability to participate in sleepovers, school trips, work after-school jobs, join clubs, date, attend prom, learn to drive and participate in everyday activities that are essential for maturing into a wholesome adult (Berzin et al., 2014; PSTSFA, 2014). Normalcy allows youth to grow so that they understand their interest, their talents, their professional and career identity and decision making skills (Berzin et al., 2014). The law ensures that during implementation, the providers including foster parents, GAL, and case workers worked together in a cohesive coalition. States helped the foster parents to ensure that the youth have normal and beneficial experiences, and enjoy opportunities and participate in developmentally age-appropriate activities (PSTSFA, 2014).

From the legal perspective, there were challenges resulting from lack of consistency in coordination. The lack of consistency and coordination among service systems, and sometimes, the inadequate training of professionals about the youth's traumatic history led to additional challenges (Krebs, Pitcoff, & Shalof, 2013). Challenges youth faced and could not surpass led to high school dropout rates, legal challenges with the system, and incarcerations as they transitioned to adulthood (Krebs, Pitcoff, & Shalof, 2013; Osgood et al., 2010). When youth encountered challenges, they did not receive adequate friendly legal grievance procedures, and the system was not responsive to their needs. Faced with challenging academic adjustments, youth who already lag behind in early reading skills and are unable to perform simple tasks, develop antisocial behaviors. They also were unable to develop proper interpersonal social skills

and identities necessary to enhance their social-emotional adjustments (Pears et al., 2011).

PSTSFA not only ensures that the youths' voices are heard, it requires states to provide the youth with documents describing their rights. It requires that the youth sign and acknowledge that the document was provided to them, and that their rights are explained at an age appropriate level (PSTSFA, 2014). Congress recognized that the policy needed adequate implementation, and therefore required states to provide prudent parenting standards and to implement contract requirements. It also mandated the designation of a caregiver, judicial review of youth cases, plans to ensure the prudent parenting standard are followed, and that the children and youth engage in age-or developmentally appropriate activities (PSTSFA, 2014). Therefore, to achieve successful implementation, the policy required implementers to work together, receive training, communicate, and collaborate. Before Congress enacted PSTSFA, Massachusetts' policy ensured that youth received state supported services and remained in the foster care system until they reached age 21 years. This was on the condition that they were enrolled in secondary education or in a program leading to GED and were enrolled in a postsecondary or vocational edudation program. The youth were also required to participated in activities that were designed to promote and remove challenges, and they were required to be employed for at least 80 hours a month (Department of Children and Families, 2016).

Problem Statement

The problem that I addressed in this study regards the implementation challenges of PSTSFA faced by Massachusetts foster care providers who provide services to youth between the ages of 13 and 17 years old. I aimed to explore and enrich understanding of the challenges that might delay and impede the transition of foster youth from supported care to independence. Congress has enacted three policies since 1999, each of which was aimed at providing foster youth with the skills to enable them to cope with adulthood after they transition from care. In 1999, Congress enacted the FCIA based on Section 477. The Social Security Act of 1935 42 U.S.C. 677 established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and provided states with flexible funding (FCIA, 1999; Social Security Act, 1935). It required states and local governments to offer extensive training programs including education, employment services, and financial support to young adults (FCIA, 1999). After FCIA of 1999, Congress enacted PSSFA in 2001, and FCSIAA in 2008 (PSSFA, 2001; FCSIAA, 2008).

In Massachusetts, to assist youth transition to independence, the state department offered services that included providing services under Title IV-E until the youth was 21 years of age and provided services to non-Title IV-E youth until they were 22 years old. Occasionally, if the youth demonstrated that without the services it would be impossible to complete a higher education, they were allowed to remain in care until they were 23 years old (Department of Children and Families, 2016). Certain restrictions applied to eligibility including but not limited to the following: the foster youth was a permanent resident of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, was not older than 24 years, and

voluntarily participated in educational support services offered by the Department of Social Service.

However, research showed that although these policies were in place, the foster youth still lacked the necessary educational, developmental, vocational, emotional, and skill training that were required to adjust and cope with the conflicts and challenges of adulthood after they transitioned from care (Pears et al., 2011; Pokempner et al., 2015). The policies did not provide foster youth the opportunity to acquire the experiences like their nonfoster counterparts. The youth continue to be sexually victimized, have no contributions or input for their transitional plans, and could not participate in age-appropriate activities (PSTSFA, 2014).

Although the previous polices existed, more than 50% of transitioned youth were still unemployed, 40% experience homelessness, and the majority of them live below poverty level (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Stott, 2012). The phenomenological inquiry explored and articulated the challenges foster care providers face in their implementation of PSTSFA, using their experiences as providers. As an inquiry, the providers had the opportunity to narrate or tell their stories based on the meaning they attributed to their experiences (DeMarrgis & Lapan, 2004). In this research, I used game theory (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944) as the theoretical framework for the research. The theory provided a relationship between the policy, the providers, and the implementation process (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore, enrich our knowledge, and enhance our understanding of the challenges faced by Massachusetts foster care providers in their implementation of PSTSFA. The research focused on providers that provide services to foster youth between the ages of 13 to 17 years. This qualitative dissertation explored the provisions of the policy including identifying, documenting, and protecting at-risk sex trafficked youth, reporting instances of sex trafficking, and providing timeline for reporting information on sex trafficked youth to law enforcement (PSTSFA, 2014). Additional proivisions in the policy include providing standard of care that ensures reasonable and prudent parenting standards, ensuring the availability of age or developmentally appropriate activities, and locating and responding to youth who run away from Foster Care. The provisions ensure there was increased information on youth in foster care as a way to prevent them from becoming victims of sex trafficking (PSTSFA, 2014).

Research Question

This study was guided by the following question: What are the perceived challenges that Massachusetts foster care providers face while implementing PSTSFA to foster youth between 13 and 17 years of age?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this study was von Neumann and Morgenstern's (1944) game theory. The theory focused on high efficiency by seeking strategic advantage through rational decision-making regarding the needs of the

individuals affected (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). During the formulation phase of PSTSFA of 2014, Congress considered the foster youth whom the policy would affect and determined ways that implementing the law might provide them with maximum utility. Although previous policies existed, Congress enacted PSTSFA with the intention of providing strategic advantage to the youth and ensured that they acquired skills that previous policies did not specify (PSTSFA, 2014; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944).

In the implementation stage, the game theory was helpful in exploring and undestanding how the implementers used this policy to ensure that the youth attain maximum utility using the information and practical training that they receive while in foster care. Concepts in the theory set the stage for the decisions that the providers made as they provided services to the youth while in foster care. The services influenced the youth's transition to adulthood and played a role in the providers' opportunity to predict the outcome of the implementation process (DeCanio & Fremstad, 2011; McMillan, 2013; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). To successfully use the game theory, all the implementers who are invloved in ensuring a successful implementation of the PSTSFA work together in a cohesive coalition with the youth as the primary focus (McMillan, 2013; PSTSFA, 2014; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944).

The implementers also weigh the challenges that might result as a result of a law and determine ways to address such challenges. Using game theory exposed the youth to differerent experiences that are deemed normal for their age, including but not limited to participation in sports, attending dance classes, volunteering in different activities, spending time with friends, participating in sleepovers, working part-time jobs, and

participating in transition planning toward successful preparation for adulthood (Pokempner et al., 2015; PSTSFA, 2014). The implementation provided the youth with opportunities to visit academic and vocational institutions and various occupational and professioal organizations including government, private and vocational organizations (Hill & Varone, 2014; PSTSFA, 2014).

Game theory is an economic concept that deals with the economic behavior of individuals in attaining maximum utility. The theory deals with maximizing utility using an individual's knowledge, understanding, and choice of action (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007; Wilson & Gowdy, 2013). In game theory, an individual's ability to attain maximum utility and optimal position is dependent on the individual's knowledge and understanding of the available choices of action (Roumboutsos & Kapros, 2008; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). Maximum utility is attainable by the youth through the application of the knowledge that they acquire, their decision making, and the choice or action that ensures that they achieve the best results while planning their future (Coleman, 2013; Curiel, 2013). The maximum attainable utility is government's anticipated level of normalcy for the youth after they transition and the providers' ability to overcome the challenges and hindrances that might impede the policy implementaiton process (Fiestras-Janeiro, García-Jurado, Meca, & Mosquera, 2011; Myerson, 2013).

The challenges might include the lack of clear standards, enforcement mechanisms, accountability, clarification of duties, training, or adequate funding as well as providers' fear of reprisal or legal consequences and inadequate permanency mechanism (Pokempner et al., 2015). Additional challenges might include the

unwillingness of the other agencies and organizations to participate in the implementation process, the inability to develop collaboration with other agencies and communities, and the lack of evaluative mechanisms to determine the success of the policy (Pokempner et al., 2015; PSTSFA, 2014; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944; Knowlton & Phillips, 2013).

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was of a qualitative phenomenological design. This design was applied to obtain responses from 17 participants who were selected using a purposeful sampling method (Suri, 2011). I used a purposeful sampling method to select 17 participants from foster care providers, including, case workers, GAL, CASAs, and foster parents (Yang & Banamah, 2014). Von Neumann and Morgenstern's (1944) game theory provided the theoretical framework and lens through which this research was reviewed. I analyzed data using Van Kaam's phenomenal analysis model and data analysis software (Van Kaam, 1959; Polkinghorne, 1989; Saldaña, 2015).

Operational Definitions

Foster care providers: Foster care providers are empowered to implement PSTSFA and ensure successful implementation as required by Congress in the policy (Andersson & Kalman, 2012; Marcus & Curtis, 2014; Newby, 2012). The foster care providers in this study include foster parents, GAL, CASAs, and case workers within the foster care system (Department of Youth Services, 2016).

Foster youth: This is a common term used to describe youth who live with unrelated foster family systems in different group residential homes or live in congregate

care, residential facilities, or in supervised independent living facilities under the control and supervision of the state. In this study, foster youth will be limited to those between 13 and 17 years old who are in the foster care system (PSTSFA, 2014).

Independence: Youth who are no longer under the supervision of the state or foster system but have transitioned from care to independent living or to adulthood. The youth now make adult decisions, and society holds them responsible for their decisions (Greeson, Garcia, Kim, & Courtney, 2014).

Normalcy: In this study, *normalcy* is a term that Congress used to describe the state of being a typical teenager and performing duties and participating in events, social programs, and activities that are characteristically youth related and protect the youth from being sexually trafficked (PSTSFA, 2014).

Sex trafficking: An illegal, organized criminal act where individuals enslave others for sexual servitude and labor (Segrave, Milivojevic, & Pickering, 2011). In the context of this study, it refers to a criminal act where youth are sexually trafficked and exploited (PSTSFA, 2014).

Transition: This is a common term used to describe the process when youth graduate from foster care to independent living. In Massachusetts, the age of transition is between 18 and 22 years because, at 18 years old, the youth has the choice of signing a waiver to remain in foster care (Department of Youth Services, 2016).

Assumptions

Assumptions in a study are expectations that the researchers believe are true but have no empirical evidence to support the claim (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). They are

expectations based on logic that are not scientifically tested, have no viable proof of existence, and are out of the researchers' control (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The assumption in this research was that the study was to be conducted rigorously, ensuring quality in the data collection and analysis. I assumed that during the data analysis, appropriate effort was made to ensure that the rate and role of bias was reduced and that the results, whether positive or negative were reported accurately.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of research was the parameter under which the study fitted and operated and what the study covered. It was the domain and range under which the research study was reviewed and investigated (Simon & Goes, 2013). The scope of this research included a review of archival reports on the transitioning in the foster care system, a review of primary studies on foster care system and utilizing the game theory as the outline that shaped the study. The purpose of this research was to explore, understand, and predict the challenge that impede the implementation of PSTSFA, based on the experiences of Massachusetts foster care providers under PSTSFA of 2014.

The delimitations of a study are the characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of the research including the choice of objectives, the research questions, and theoretical perspective that pertain to the study (Simon & Goes, 2013). This research is delimited to the population of the implementers of the law or policy in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The results will be valid and generalized to the Commonwealth; however, the results could also be generalized to the foster care system

in the country because the PSTSFA policy that Congress enacted affects the entire nation, not only one specific state.

Limitations

Limitations of a study are the potential weaknesses, occurrences, and matters in the study that are out of the control of the researcher (Simon & Goes, 2013). The mindset from which a researcher writes, or the reader's stance, affects the perspective from which the respondents respond to the open-ended survey questions. In this qualitative research, the questions were an openended online survey of foster care providers in Massachusetts. One of the constraints in this study was the desire of the respondents to answer questions in monosyllables, or what appeared to be a code of silence among the providers (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Simon & Goes, 2013). During data collection, providers responded and discussed the challenges that the providers faced, so long as the discussions were not recorded. Another limitation was the probability that the questions could be too difficult for the providers to respond. To address the limitation of the open-ended questions, two foster care professional experts reviewed the open-ended survey questions before they were administered to the participants. The experts provided feedback regarding the level of difficulty of the questions.

Another limitation was the potential for emotional impact on the responses of the participants. The topic of the implementation challenges of this law is one that generates mixed responses and biases based on the information, experiences, decisions, and the state of mind of the participant and readers. Therefore, participants' responses could be based on the emotional attachment for or against the law, the level of frustration that the

implementation challenges have generated, or the lack of cooperation or coalition from the other implementers. The frustrations could make the responses lopsided and biased.

The researcher's bias is another limitation to the research. The perceived inability of the government and other organizations to cater to the needs of the youth in foster care and to protect them from harm has been an ongoing debate, and progress in outcome seem to be slower than expected. Congress has passed policies in the past, but they have not alleviated the challenges that youth who transitioned from foster care encountered; therefore, there is the fear that additional policies may not produce the expected results. Instead, the implementation of the policies might be where the challenges lie. Before choosing this topic, I met a youth in a homeless live-in shelter who later transitioned from the foster care system. The youth believed that his despondent predicament and that of others in similar situation was because no one cared enough about them. Policies were in place at the time of this meeting; however, there was no way to determine if the implementers could ensure that the implementation of this new policy will be different, and that the collective challenges of the youth will be resolved effectively.

In addressing these limitations, I performed a comprehensive search strategy including reviewing various databases in search for primary studies relating to this topic. It was also important to keep an open mind, listen to other individuals, and read research documents regardless of the researchers' or contributors' opinions or stance on the subject matter. In addition, a third party including my dissertation chair, dissertation committee member, and a pilot group reviewed the questions prior to administering them to the participants.

Keeping an open mind was important because ensured that data collection was not restricted to a small geographical location or professional affiliation. The subjects responded to the open-ended surveys and were affiliated with the different professions that provide services to the foster youth. Furthermore, it was important to keep an open mind and ensure the population that responded to the survey were sufficient to reduce the incidence of bias that may suffice in the research.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study may be significant to policy makers as it may provide Congress with information relating to the success of the law, as well as challenges to implementing it. Such feedback might expose factors that Congress, working with implementers, needs to address to improve the law's expected outcome. The research addressed the various implementation challenges including funding, training, and the collaboration among the providers. The research also addressed such issues as community involvement and foster parents' fear of legal reprisal. The recommendations of the research will be useful to the extent that they focus on the challenges as explained by the providers.

Finally, this research may be significant because PSTSFA of 2014 is a recent law, and this is an opportunity to address the implementation challenges from a publc policy perspective. Different researchers have discussed youth transition from foster care and the challenges of implementing related laws from the perspective of social work, psychology, psychiatry, and law. This is an opportunity to review the implementation of the law from the public policy perspective. It is an opportunity to contribute to the

implementation of a new policy, address its practicality, and provide recommendations regarding ways of addressing the challenges of implementation.

Implications for Positive Social Change

A policy is important, but also important is the implementation of the policy. However good a policy is, the implementation can determine its success or failure. A good knowledge of the challenges associated with implementing a policy and the ability of the implementers to overcome the implementation challenges determines the policy's potential effectiveness (Damshroder & Hogedorn, 2011).

One of the implications of the study to social change might be its contribution to changing the quality of life of the youth who transition from foster care. According to existing reports, more than 30% of youth who transition from foster care in Massachusetts have no jobs, have been homeless, did not graduate high school, or have some psychological challenges after they transition from foster care (Yates & Grey, 2012). Congress formulated PSTSFA of 2014, however, just like the previous policies, unless implementers work together in coalition to ensure successful implementation, the predicament of the youth in foster care might not change (PSTSFA, 2014). Nationwide, the consensus among all the research about transitioned youth is that more than 57% of youth are unable to cope and adjust to independence and the challenges of adulthood (Avery, 2011; Berzin et al., 2014; Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Yates & Grey, 2012).

A new law to reverse this statistic might not succeed if the law implmenters do not identify and address the challenges that are associated with it and recommend ways that they might be ameliorated or eliminated which is the focus of this study. An

implemented policy that identifies the implementation challenges and recommends possible solutions to those challenges will not only change the predicament of the foster care system and the foster youth but will protect the rights of the implementers.

Summary

Laws and policies are enacted to be used; however, unless the challenges associated with implementing the law are identified and addressed, it might not serve its full purpose. In Chapter 1, I discussed PSTSFA of 2014 and the associated details of the law. The chapter introduced the concept of transition from foster care, the recent law that Congress passed regarding the issue, the problem and purpose of the study and explained the theoretical foundation of the research. I explained the significance of the study to social change and introduced us to the various challenges that might be associated with the law.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation consists of a review of literature and articles that discussed PSTSFA. The chapter includes a comprehensive review of the game theory as the theoretical framework to investigate the topic. Also discussed in the chapter are the use of phenomenological inquiry to investigate the experiences of the providers, and to explore the challenges associated with implementing PSTSFA. The review of the policy focused on the providers who ensure that youth received the necessary information for transition planning. The review also focuses on providers who provide the education and skills training that are necessary for foster youths' successful transition to adulthood (PSTSFA, 2014). Chapter 2 presents an extensive review of PSTSFA and includes review

and presentation of the different aspects of the law as it relates to the foster youth, the foster parents, the legal system, and the economy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this dissertation, I explored and projected the challenges faced by foster care providers in Massachusetts in their implementation of the PSTSFA. In 1999, Congress enacted the FCIA of 1999; part of this policy established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program to provide states with flexible funding to meet the educational, training, and financial needs of youths (FCIA, 1999). Since then, additional policies, including PSSFA of 2001 and FCSIAA of 2008, have been enacted (FCSIAA, 2008; PSSFA, 2001). However, the challenges that foster youth encounter while in foster care and after transitioning out of care remained, because the policies did not eliminate the challenges or increase their coping skills.

Foster youth encounter various emotional and behavioral challenges resulting from trauma-related experiences and exposures before, during, and after they are removed from their original homes and families (Batsche et al, 2012; Unrau, 2011). Some of these traumatic experiences resulted from loss of identity following their removal from their families and sometimes the communities that they knew (Porfeli & Lee, 2012). The expectation that they immediately adjust to new lives and environments ignored the grief associated with the removal from and loss of existing families, friends, schools, and the communities to which they were accustomed (Porfeli & Lee, 2012). The challenges many of the youth face result in their inability to acquire the education and training that prepared them and equipped them with the necessary coping skills that they required after they transitioned from the foster care system (Berzin et al., 2014). Because of lack of significant change in the outcome of the youth after they transition, in 2014 Congress

enacted PSTSFA. The law included the clause that implementers ensured that the challenges associated with the implementation of the law were identified and addressed, thereby facilitating the success of transition planning (PSTSFA, 2014).

Despite research and contributions by various scholars, including prior policies of Congress, meaningful changes within the foster care system have been slow and ineffective. The reason for the lack of significant change has been attributed to several reasons including implementation challenges and the fact that the children and youth who are impacted by the policies do not contribute to decisions and planning that affect their educational expectations and aspirations (Kirk, Lewis, Nilsen, & Colvin, 2011). In addition, parent and family behavior play a role in children's aspiration levels and ability to explore, develop, achieve dreams, and live normal teenage lives, but youth in foster care do not have stable relationships or opportunities (Kirk et al., 2011; PSTSFA, 2014). The youth in foster care require the type of education and training that will develop their identity mentally, socially and vocationally, so that they can experience the same lifestyle as their non-foster counterparts in the community (Porfeli & Lee, 2012; PSTSFA, 2014).

Literature Search Strategy

I reviewed Electronic databases, journals, websites, electronic dissertation, websites and various government, and other foster care agency websites. The electronic databases included Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, Emerald Management and Emerald Insight, Education Research Center (ERIC) and Education Research Complete Simultaneous Search. I also researched Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Nursing and Allied Health Sources, and ProQuest Science Journals.

Various journal websites containing foster care related researches included *Journal of Family and Social Work, Journal of Public Child Welfare, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Social Work Research, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,* and *School Psychology Review*, and Wiley Periodicals Inc. I also reviewed published databases including the *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Journal of Adolescent Research and Government* websites including Massachusetts foster system powered by the Department of Health and Human Services, and Congress.gov and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). I also used Google Scholar for additional searches, and the documents that I reviewed during the searches to supplement the different websites in the study. Appendix A details the literature review search log.

Key Search Terms

The primary key search terms that I used for this literature review included *qualitative research, phenomenology, game theory, logic model, game theory in public policy, evaluating public policy with logic model, evaluating with logic model, and purposeful sampling method*. Additional search terms included *foster children, foster care system, educational outcomes, transition programs, Massachusetts foster care system, and HHS*. Also searched were *homelessness among children and youth, welfare programs, educational development among foster children, improving education outcomes for children and youth, and transition of foster youth*. Finally, I researched and reviewed documents about *transition from foster care system, education gap between foster and non-foster children and youth, coping skills among foster children and youth, and resilience of the foster care child and youth*. Appendix A contains a list of the

literature review search log, and Appendix B provides a list of the different databases and key search terms.

Public Policy

Public policy involves the decisions by the government to make laws or statutes regarding particular problems or issues. In public policy, the government or similar and equivalent authority makes laws, statutes, regulations, executive orders, and rules that are intended to resolve a public problem (Bardach & Patashnik, 2015; Birkland, 2014; Sabatier & Weible, 2014). Public policy is the action of the government and the intention that determines the action. Public policies are laws or sets of laws that govern a particular issue or area of a problem; they consist of political decisions to implement process (Birkland, 2014; Dunn, 2015).

Public Policy Process

The public policy process involves the interaction between a public policy and the actors, events, contexts, and outcomes that deal with the formulation and implementation of public policy. It deals with how the implementers or providers define and seek to resolve policy problems (Birkland, 2014; Gerston, 2014). The actors are the individuals and groups that actively seek to influence policy or policy outcome on issues. The events are the anticipated or unanticipated incidences that lead to or may result in public policy. Events range from election, societal dilemmas, and crises that relate cultures, socioeconomic behaviors, infrastructure, social issues, and rules that constitute the rule of law (Birkland, 2014; Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

Outcomes in the policy process are the short and long-term consequences or impacts of the policy as it interacts with the public. The outcome of one policy could become the input for another (Gerston, 2014; Sabatier & Weible, 2014). For instance, Congress enacted the PSTSFA when the outcome of the existing policies did not address the needs of youth that were transitioning from the foster care system. When Congress enacted Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, the expected results were different from the real result (FCSIAA, 2008; McCain, 2009). Evaluation of the previous policies revealed that the policies did not sufficiently address the needs of the youth who transitioned from foster care (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Stott, 2012). They lacked the normalcy that non-foster youth possessed, and unlike the non-foster youth, the foster youth could not participate in issues that affected their lives and their futures (Pears et al., 2011). As a result, congress enacted PSTSFA, and instructed states to comply with the provisions of the law (PSTSFA, 2014).

In Massachusetts, youth receive services until their 22nd or 23rd birthday (Department of Children and Families, 2016). The implementers who ensure that the youth receive the services that they require include the lawyers, social workers, foster caretakers, parents, guardians, foster parents, and the youths' immediate family including siblings (Department of Children and Families, 2016). The services that the DHHS provides to the youth are based on availability of resources; for the youth to receive the services, they have to be in the foster care system.

Theoretical Foundation

In this dissertation, von Neumann and Morgenstern (1944) and von Neumann, and Morgenstern's (2007) game theory was applied as the theoretical foundation to explain the importance of coalition by various implementers to ensure success in the policy implementation process. Game theory provides techniques for analyzing situations in which the different agents rely on one another to obtain maximum utility (Fiestras-Janeiro et al., 2011; McMillan, 2013). In game theory, no one-agent works alone to accomplish a goal, but instead all the agents work collaboratively to accomplish uniformly set goals (Curiel, 2013). Success of game theory depends on the agents' awareness of the interrelationship of the agents' decisions, actions, and interactions to achieve collusive outcome and maximum utility (Myerson, 2013; Wilson & Gowdy, 2013).

In game theory, formulating and accomplishing any policy depends on the game theoretical characters. The game theoretical characters include the negotiations, communal cohesion, unified or common agenda or unitary will, and agents' reframe from monopoly (McMillan, 2013; Zhao, Wang, Cheng, Yang, & Huang, 2010). In addition to the above, game theoretical characters also include sharing of costs and responsibilities within the alliance and strategic coordination where the agent's best action and results are dependent on the action and results of other agents (McMillan, 2013).

In game theory, a coalition is the collection of the sum of all of the agents in the game. If N represents the sum of the agents, S represents the subset of N, and the decision of S can be added together, the utility of the coalition will be the sum of the utilities of

the agents within the coalition to achieve public good or benefit for all the agents (Colman, 2013; Ichiishi, 2014;). The public good or benefit will be a direct function of the subset S; the problem of the subsets S within the N becomes the problem of N in the production of the public good (McMillan, 2013; Wilson & Gowdy, 2013).

Game theory provides a framework that is relevant to determining the relationship between the current training, education, and experience that youth in foster care receive, and the changes that might result if as the implementers play crucial roles resolving challenges and developing youth as they plan for their future (Colman, 2013). Game theory enables the prediction in a paradigm shift that could ensure that implementers start to prepare youth for independence at an early age by providing them normalcy that will lead to independent adulthood (Curiel, 2013; Fiestras-Janeiro et al., 2011). A paradigm shift to adequate protection, provides normalcy opportunities that provide the foster youth with the skills that will stimulate higher levels of growth and development (Zhao et al., 2010). The game theory provided a framework for exploring and assessing the factors in the law that were required to implement the law and the implementation challenges that providers faced while implementing the law (McCain, 2009; PSTSFA, 2014).

Game Theory

Game theory was developed to present discussions on economic theory and the study of economic behavior (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). Game theory explores the rational of individuals who seek and obtain optimal utility and maximum profit in entrepreneurship (Myerson, 2013). It is applicable in typical situations that deal with the

exchange of goods between two or more individuals of bilateral monopoly or free competition (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944; Zhao et al., 2010). Game theory is interactive decision-making because it can be used to understand human activity and interactive decision-making process (McCain, 2010; Myerson, 2013). Game theory is a strategy that could be used to develop economic behavior and to achieve or attain economic success in the face of unfavorable circumstances (Myerson, 2013).

When combining notions of economic behavior and game theory, as this research proposes, the foster care system and the youth represent the consumer who desires optimal utility or satisfaction (Curiel, 2013; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007). The entrepreneur, including Congress and other implementers or foster care providers, desire maximum profit from the enacted policy outputs and outcomes (Ichiishi, 2014). Together, the consumer and entrepreneur should work together to attain the satisfaction that each of them desire (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944).

Types of Game Theory

Game theory can be divided in a twofold manner: non-cooperative and cooperative (Curiel, 2013; Ichiishi, 2014). Cooperative game theory is applicable when the agreements between the parties are mutual and enforceable while the non-cooperative game theory applies when there is no agreement between the parties (McCain, 2010). For instance, Congress obtaining feedback from foster care providers before drafting a law that affects the foster care system and insuring that the law includes the contributions of the providers is cooperative game theory (Hill & Varone, 2014; Ichiishi, 2014). Congress unilaterally formulating a law without prior consultation with the foster care providers

and implementers and expecting the providers to apply the law without contributing their thoughts is an example of non-cooperative game theory (Curiel, 2013).

Communication and The Prisoners' Dilemma in Game Theory

In game theory, communication is the most important way that players cooperate and ensure the team members make acceptable choices that will help them win a game (Zagare, 1984). Through communication, parties discuss and decide on choices that might lead to the success of the team (Zagare, 1984). Absence of communication leads to a lack of collaboration and lack of success in decision making.

The prisoners' dilemma reveals how communication in any relationship can be useful in achieving set goals. In the prisoners' dilemma, two prisoners, A and B who conspired to commit a crime were captured and put in separate cells. Each prisoner was told to confess and receive a lesser punishment and that the prisoner who refused to confess would receive a more severe or greater punishment (Morçöl, 2013; Zhao et al., 2010). Each of the prisoners had the fear the other prisoner might confess and receive a lesser punishment meaning greater or more severe punishment for himself, which created quite the dilemma (Hill & Varone, 2014; McMillan, 2013). The prisoners' choices or actions are represented are in four options:

- A confesses, receives a light sentence, and B receives a severe sentence.
- B confesses, receives a light sentence, and A receives a severe sentence.
- A and B refuse to confess, and they both receive severe sentences.
- A and B confess, and they both receive light sentences.

This prison dilemma can be applied to game theoretical characters of collaboration and negotiations, communities with a unified common agenda or unitary will, reframe from monopoly, sharing of costs and responsibilities, and strategic coordination of responsibilities (Hill & Varone, 2014; McMillan, 2013; Wilson & Gowdy, 2013).

Successful Application of Game Theoretical Characters

Game theory can be applied to achieve maximum utility if the players have a unified common agenda or unitary will. The assumption of the game theoretical characters is that they satisfy a specific agreement (Curiel, 2013; Ichiishi, 2014). The strategy or choice of action of the players will result in a common or harmonious goal, and none of the players will have a reason to deflect and pursue alternate agenda (DeCanio & Fremstad, 2011; Hill & Varone, 2014).

When Congress enacted PSTSFA, a policy that potentially impacts the foster youth's ability to cope and adjust to independence, Congress expected the policy implementers including youth, states and local governments, researchers, nonprofits, public organizations, and other interest groups to be involved in the policy formulation process (Ichiishi, 2014; John, 2013; PSTSFA, 2014). In the same manner, implementers are expected to work together to ensure successful implementation of the policy (John, 2013; Gerston, 2014). Non-cooperative game theory is effective in diagnostic or problem-solving situations, but its application results in instability and ineffective implementation due to lack of coercion and agreement among the participants (DeCanio & Fremstad, 2011). Cooperative game theory allows public policy to be effective because

it provides for coalition among the stakeholders (implementers) or the parties involved (McCain, 2010; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944).

Uses of Game Theory in PSTSFA

In an interactive decision-making process, game theory operates with specific sets of rules or laws that direct the economic activity under consideration. The action or behavior of the participants in that economy, and the events that determine the attainment of optimal utility and maximum profit of all the parties or implementers that are involved (Hill & Varone, 2014; McMillan, 2013; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). For individuals to attain optimal utility in game theory, the parties become interdependent on one another and work together to develop, formulate, or implement the rules that apply in the game (McCain, 2010). The participants on both sides of the spectrum (players and recipients) become partners and work with the expectation to fundamentally secure an advantage over the other (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007).

By applying game theory, Congress would not unilaterally enact policies that would affect the transitioning foster youth. Likewise, agents or implementers are not expected to unilaterally implement the policy without the interaction and cooperation of other implementers that the policy affects, such as the foster youth, foster parents, biological parents and social worker (Dunn, 2015; Fiestras-Janeiro et al., 2011; John, 2013; Myerson, 2013). Ideally, after Congress has enacted the policy, based on common strategies that will positively improve the lives of the children and youth, the implementers work together with the youth to ensure the successful outcome of the policy (McCain, 2010). They work together to ensure that the youth are well informed of

the education, training, information, and experiences that they will need outside of the foster care system, using real world examples of interest (Zhao et al., 2010). The interactive decisions from the different actors will focus on the youth's objectives, the cost benefits to be advanced, and the economic benefit that will be applied as the youth plans his or her future (McCain, 2010; Zhao, Wang et al., 2010). Therefore, Congress, in enacting policies, might weigh the cost of their decisions, the impact of the decisions, and the benefits to the consumers (children and youths within the foster care system) (McCain, 2010).

Game theory provides the platform where interactions and coalition between various players, groups, and decision-makers can be modelled to determine possible or expected outcome. The theory ensures that all players understand the relationship between the various organizations that play a role in ensuring that the enacted policies are successfully implemented (Colman, 2013; Roumboutsos & Kapros, 2008; Zhao et al., 2010). From the theoretical perspective, the effect of using game theory to understand the application of the logic model might not be obvious (Morçöl, 2013). However, recording the progressive impact on the youths' decisions might make it possible to understand the correlation between the eduation, information, and experience that they acquire at various levels (Colman, 2013).

Words Associated With Game Theory

Words associated with game theory include *game*, *move*, *choice*, *strategy*, and *rules of the game* (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007). The *game* by itself is the totality of the rules governing the moves (Madani, 2013;

Morçöl, 2013). *Move* is the occasion of the players' choice between various available alternative decisions under the conditions prescribed by the *rules of the game* (Morçöl, 2013). The *choice* is the specific alternative chosen by the player (individual or device), and *strategy* is the player's principle governing the choice (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). The *rules of the game* are absolute, concrete, and based on the general principles governing the game. Rules must specify the outcome of the play for each player, and if there is violation or infringement of those rules, the transactions cease. In the game, every move consists of some alternatives, among which the player's move constitutes the choice (McCain, 2010; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944).

Congress and the implementers could apply game theory to ensure there is integration of divergent experencies into their plans when formulating and implementing policies designed to identify and protect youth at risk of sex trafficking, to promote participation in age-appropriate activities, to institute reasonable and prudent parent standards, to protect the rights of the youth, to mandate judicial review of nomalcy for youth, and to enhance and inform the youth about the options that are available to enable them to help plan their futures (Colman, 2013; Roumboutsos & Kapros, 2008; Zhao et al., 2010; PSTSFA, 2014; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). Such integration ensures that the youth are protected from being trafficked, and that by the time they transition, they have attained and experienced normalcy and acquired the knowledge, training, and experience that will equip then with the adjustment skills to cope with independence (PSTSFA, 2014; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). This requires that the implementers utilize all available options and resources to overcome challenges that

could hinder the successful implementation of the law that Congress enacted (Fiestras-Janeiro et al., 2011, PSTSFA, 2014).

Function of Game Theory

Game theory plays a crucial role in understanding the results of coalition or cooperation in relationships that exists between the policy makers (Congress), policy implementers (states and local governments), the policy itself (the law), and the primary recipients of the policy (children and youth who will transition from foster care). Using game theory, the formulation of public policy should be a pragmatic and an interactive process that transitions through various evolutionary stages until the implementers work together and implement the policy (Colman, 2013; Ichiishi, 2014; Roumboutsos & Kapros, 2008; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). In the initial stages, Congress reviews the various alternatives and determines the impact of each alternative on those in the community that are affected by the policy (Ichiishi, 2014; McCain, 2010). A review of the alternatives includes determining the activities that states will perform to bring about maximum utility for the youth (Colman, 2013; Ichiishi, 2014). The states enact legislations that ensure the role of the child welfare agencies, the contracted providers, and the courts in the successful implementation of the law that Congress had enacted (Colman, 2013; Curiel, 2013). The conclusive results depend on the level of effectiveness of the implementation and other alternatives, the level of challenges that the different implementers encounter, and the impact of the challenges on the successful implantation of the law (PSTSFA, 2014; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944).

Using the information provided by the respondents of the online open-ended survey questions that were administered to the implementers of the law, the study explored possible ways that the implementation challenges associated with this law might be reduced or eliminated. All the players involved in the policy formulation choose common goals and form coalitions based on the best strategies that will be most advantageous and that will provide optimal utility to ensuring that the enacted law is successfully implemented (Colman, 2013; Fiestras-Janeiro et al., 2011; Madani, 2013; McCain, 2010;). Jointly implementing the rules of the game (the law) ensures that the implementers meet the objectives, goals, and outcomes of the law.

Game Theory and Logic Modeling

Game theory is useful and relevant to predicting human behavior and in determining the strategies and decisions that will be effective in promulgating, postulating, or implementing policies that will influence the foster youth by providing the information and experience they require (Fiestras-Janeiro et al., 2011; Knowlton & Phillips, 2013; Yates & Grey, 2012). Game theory provides a tool in exploring the best methods for implementing the law that is designed to provide the youth with optimal utility in attaining their set target (Manning, 2002; Yates & Grey, 2012).

In formulating policies that govern the foster care system, Congress based its decisions on the various alternatives that influence the following: protection and education of youth, financial and transitional assistance, the ability to attain normalcy and skills for coping with independence, and developmental, vocational, and career training (PSTSFA, 2014; Knowlton & Phillips, 2013; von Neumann & Morgenstern,

1944). Using information from available research, Congress collaborated with the states and local governments to enact PSTSFA, so that the youth, their families, and the foster care system might attain optimal utility and maximum profit from its decision (Fiestras-Janeiro et al., 2011; Madani, 2013). After Congress has formulated the policy, the states enact legislation and procedures that ensure the various implementers successfully work together to achieve the desired goals.

Literature Review

This literature review focused on exploring, understanding, and predicting the challenges faced by foster care providers in their implementation of PSTSFA in Massachusetts. It discussed collaboration among the implementers and explained the role of states and local governments in ensuring that youth between 13 and 17 years old acquire the skills, education, and resources as specified by the law (Tilbury, 2014; McCabe, Wertlieb, & Saywitz, 2013; Zhao et al., 2010). The providers the proposal focused on were those who provide services to foster youth between 13 and 17 years old. Through them, foster youth learn and acquire master skills that enable them to transition successfully to adulthood and to independent living (PSTSFA, 2014).

The literature review also focused on the implementation challenges that states, local government, and other providers encounter by addressing the variables that are specified in PSTSFA. It addressed challenges that could impede guaranteeing the training the youth in foster care receive is at the same level as their non-foster counterparts and that the youth are protected from becoming victims of sex trafficking (PSTSFA, 2014) using the game theory (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944) through public policy

implementation process (Bardach & Patashnick, 2016). Part of the review discussed and explored game theory from the perspective of being a collaborative mechanism among the various implementers or providers who enhance the youth's personal, professional, and occupational identity (Cairney, 2013; Tilbury, 2014). The discussion also focused on the issue of achieving normalcy in the training that the youth in the foster care receive as compared to their non-foster counterpart and the effect of the training on the youth's brain function (PSTSFA, 2014; McCabe et al., 2013).

Finally, the discussion in the literature review followed a specific pattern that included discussion topics that included sex trafficking law, education of foster youth, and ensuring that the youth receive adequate training and funding to help them acquire the same level of adjustment to independence as the non-foster youth (PSTSFA, 2014). The discussion of each of the factors included possible implementation challenges that the providers encounter during the policy implementation process. Recommendations for reducing or eliminating the challenges were discussed (Bardach & Patashnick, 2016; Tilbury, 2014).

Applying game theory, Congress (represented as A in Figure 1) enacted PSTSFA by targeting the youth (represented by C). Congress expects the state child welfare agencies, contracted providers, and the courts (represented by B1, B2 and B3) to identify, document and protect youth from sex trafficking, to facilitate age appropriate experiences, and to promote normalcy for the youth. Congress also expects that the law, at implementation, will improve the outcome for the foster youth because it will protect

and provide them with opportunity to gain skills and improve their transition to independence (PSTSFA, 2014).

Principle of Expected Utility Maximization

In this literature review, game theory focuses on utility maximization, and optimizes chosen solutions that maximizes the output and outcome (Colman, 2003; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). In an interconnected multifactor society, the method of governance of PSTSFA involves processes that includes cooperation of participation, dialogue, action and interaction in similar activities, and evaluation of activities (Hermans, Cunningham, & Slinger, 2014). This recognizes that during implementation, actors collaborate (Tilbury, 2014). When they face restraints, they collaboratively make choices and professional judgements because they understand the expected outcomes, which are based on the policy design, objectives, and goals (Hermans et al., 2014; Madani, 2013).

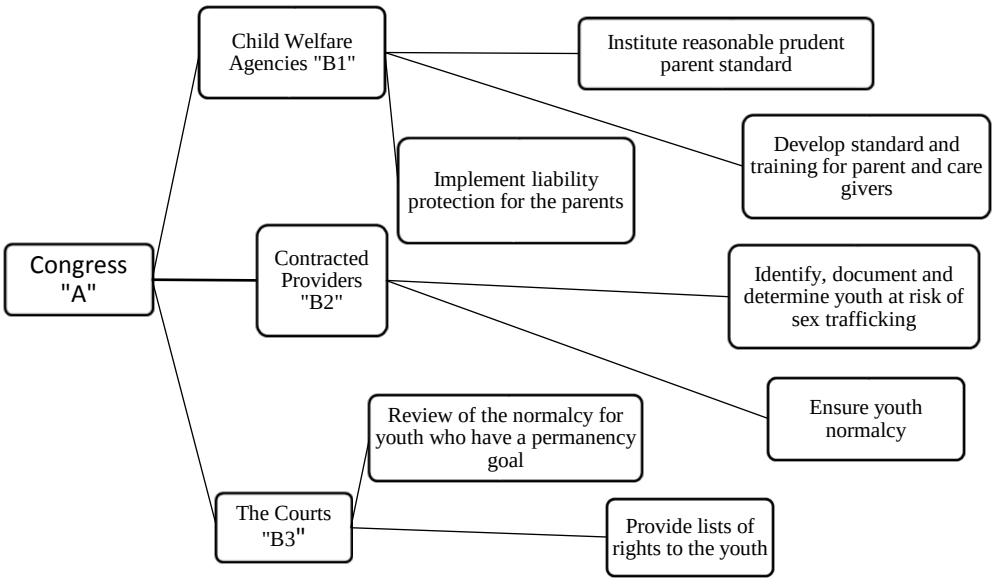

Figure 1. Role of foster care players. Figure 1 represents the general outline of the literature review. It explains the application of game theory in the implementation of PSTSFA, and the ways that actors seek cooperative solution for a social dilemma (Fiestras-Janeiro et al., 2011; Zhao et al., 2010).

Structurally, the formation of PSTSFA optimized the fundamentals of collective action to structure and support enforcement and compliance (Myerson, 2013; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). It explains the implementers specified roles from Congress, through the states, the foster parents, the courts, and other contracted providers as represented by A through B_1, B_2, and B_3 (Dunn, 2015; Gerston, 2014; John, 2013; Sabatier & Weible, 2014). A successful completion of the different roles ensures successful implementation of the law, and ultimately, that the youth will acquire the necessary skills to successfully transition from the foster care system to adulthood

(Hermans et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2010). As an evaluative mechanism combined with the logic model, in PSTSFA, game theory is useful in determining why certain desirable outcomes were not observed or could not attain the expected utility maximization (Colman, 2003; Hermans et al., 2014).

Congress expects states to identify, document, and determine services for youth who were at risk for sex trafficking, to report instances of sex trafficking, and to respond and locate children who run away (PSTSFA, 2014). Figure 2 depicts the nature of collaboration between Congress and the implementers to ensure the successful implementation of PSTSFA. The figure depicts the structural information that is available for decision-making purposes and presents the role of game theory and the logic model (Hermans et al., 2014). The role of the providers in ensuring successful implementation of the law through collaboration is also represented (Naimoli, Frymus, Wuliji, Franco, & Newsome, 2014). The figure is a representation of the application of the objectives of game theory in the formulation and implementation of PSTSFA.

In Figure 2, input that will be required for the states and local governments to successfully implement the policy are funding, the courts, and the community. The states ensure there are sufficient resources to implement the policy through foster care providers, the law enforcement agencies, various organizations, secondary and postsecondary institutions, the courts, and various vocational institutions (Naimoli et al., 2014). The foster care providers include social case workers and managers, GAL, CASA, and foster parents who provide services to foster youth between 13 and 17 years old. At the activity level, the states and local governments comply with the specifications that are

included in the policy by identifying and protecting youth who are at risk of being sex trafficked and develop programs that will be required to provide normalcy to the youth (PSTSFA, 2014; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944).

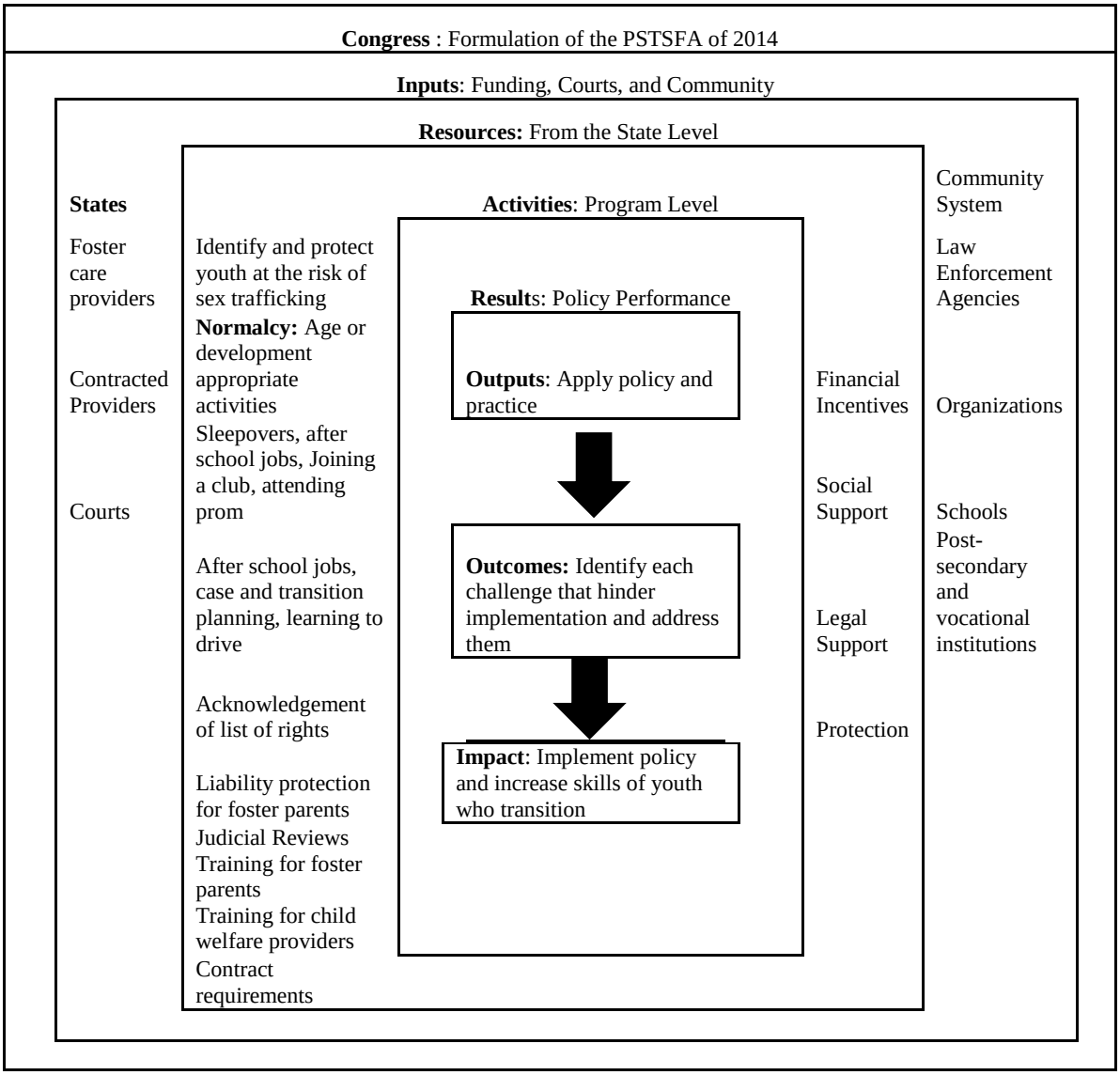

Figure 2. Collaborative interaction between players. Figure 2 represents the collaboration of the providers (players), including the foster care providers, the communities, different organizations and foster youth collaboratively work together to achieve a common goal. Congress formulates the policy (PSTSFA) that states and local government will implement and utilize (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016).

Gap in Literature

There is a gap in knowledge related to the implementation challenges associated with PSTSFA. Though research exists on the subject of the challenges that foster care providers encounter, including recommendations on methods of overcoming the challenges, there is no literature on which challenges constitute the most common impediments to PSTSFA. For instance, numerous authors address challenges associated with implementing various public policies. However, no research addressing the implementation challenges of PSTSFA specifically exists (PSTSFA, 2014). PSTSFA is a new law implemented in 2015. Exploring, understanding and predicting the challenges associated with implementing the law through the experiences of the providers and addressing such challenges might be crucial to its successful implementation process (Proctor, Powell, & McMillen, 2013; Nilsen, Ståhl, Roback, & Cairney, 2013).

In addition, the challenges of the implementation of foster care policies have been studied by different schools of thought including: social work, psychology, psychiatry, medicine, and education. However, this research will address the implementation challenges associated with implementing PSTSFA from a public policy perspective (PSTSFA, 2014; Nilsen et al., 2013; Proctor et al., 2013; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). By obtaining responses from eight foster care providers until saturation level is attained, this research will focus on the implementation challenges as narrated by the foster care providers (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2013; Huber et al., 2013). Based on the responses from the foster care providers, the proposal will attempt to draw a conclusion regarding their challenges and to bridge the gap between the lived experiences

of the providers and the public policy perspective. In addition, ways that those challenges might be overcome within game theory will be discussed (Barkhuizen et al., 2013; Cortazzi, 2014).

Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Familes Act of 2014 – The Bill

Congress passed PSTSFA in September of 2014 to cater to the needs of youth in the foster care system. Subtitle A of PSTSFA required states to identify, document, and determine services for youth at risk of sex trafficking, to report instances of sex trafficking, and to include sex trafficking data in the adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System. In addition to that, the bill required states to locate and respond to children who run away from foster care and to increase information on youth in foster care to prevent sex trafficking (PSTSFA, 2014). The bill required states to provide normalcy for the youth by guaranteeing that they are given the same opportunities as their non-foster counterparts and to provide them with opportunities to learn skills that they might utilize after they transition to adulthood (Berzin et al., 2014; Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Stott, 2012). The type of training youth receive while in foster care determines whether the youth transition out of care with the skills and support they require to successfully transition to adulthood (Ramseyer Winter et al., 2016).

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking occurs when individuals force or lure others away from their homes or environments into conditions of service including forced labor and sexual exploitation (Brysk & Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2012). Human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation is a global crime that has become so rampant that attempts by researchers to

determine the exact number of victims have failed; therefore, the available statistical data has been unreliable and uncoordinated (Brysk, 2013; Rafferty, 2013). Of the number of individuals who are human trafficked, 79% are sex trafficked. Because the large percentage of traffickers are heterosexual, girls are primarily affected; however, boys are also at risk of sex trafficking because of exploitation by adult males (Rafferty, 2013; United Stated Department of State, 2015). However, this proposal will focus on youth who are between 14 and 18 years old and are under the care of the foster system. Because of the hidden nature of the crime, the specific number of foster youth who are involved in sex trafficking could not be verified (Cho, Dreher, & Neumayer, 2014; United Stated Department of State, 2015).

Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking is an organized crime, and the criminal's sole purpose is to exploit victims in a sexual manner to generate profit. It is a form of sex enslavement of minors or youth below the age of 18 years for the purpose of commercial sex acts or for transactional purposes. It is a commercial sex act that is obtained by fraud, force or coercion from an individual that is less than 18 years old (USC, Title 22, Chapter 78, & 7102, Sec. 9A). Individuals trap their victims and sexually exploit them in exchange for money or other things of value (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014; Cho et al., 2014).

Factors that Influence Sex Trafficking and Modes of Recruitment

Various factors influence sex trafficking, child abuse, or domestic violence. The factors include praying on members of immigrant communities, family dysfunction and divorce, peer pressure and involvement with gangs, runaway youth, poverty and

homelessness (Clayton, Krugman, & Simon, 2013; Diaz, Clayton, & Simon, 2014). The mode of recruitment or initiation includes word of mouth by other youth, initiation by previous sex trafficked victims, and the internet or social media (Ahrens et al., 2012; Clayton et al., 2013; Diaz et al., 2014; Heinrich, & Sreeharsha, 2013; Rafferty, 2013). Additional modes of recruitment include advertisement or bogus employment agencies, fraudulent advertising, social media and networking sites and chat rooms, the false promise of better lives, and promise of marriage and employment (Rafferty, 2013). Youth who are trafficked show a tendency to become traffickers and exploit other youth (Rafferty, 2013).

PSTSFA and the Issue of Sex Trafficking of Youth in Massachusetts

On a national level, the estimated number of children that are trafficked for commercial purpose range between 100,000 to 300,000 (Marcus & Curtis, 2014). In 2000, Congress enacted the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act to include children below 18 years; however, the number of convictions and rescue has been low because of the low number of documented victims and victimizers (Marcus & Curtis, 2014). In Massachusetts, 62 cases of human trafficking were reported to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) in 2015, and the National Center of Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) estimated that one of every five of the 11,800 runaways reported to the office in 2015 were likely victims of sex trafficking (Executive Order No. 568, 2015). Of the number of runaways, 1747 or 74% of the youth were likely sex trafficked and were in care of social services or foster care when they were reported

missing (Executive Order No. 568, 2015; National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2016).

Congress enacted PSTSFA to prevent sex trafficking of youth in foster care and to identify youth who could be at risk of being sex trafficked. The policy directed states, in consultation with the state and local law enforcements, juvenile justice system, health care providers, education agencies and other organizations who had the experience of dealing with at-risk youth, to develop policies, procedures and training for caseworkers (PSTSFA, 2014). The procedure included identifying youth that the state has responsibility over and whom the state had reason to believe were at risk of being trafficked or were sex trafficking victims as well as locating youth who run away from foster care (PSTSFA, 2014). The state was required to determine the primary factors why the youth ran away and their experiences during the period when they ran and were not in foster care (PSTSFA, 2014). The state was also required to report any abductions to the law enforcement authorities for entry into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (PSTSFA, 2014).

Foster Care Providers and other Implementers of the Law

Congress directed states to work with law enforcement to lead the enforcement of this law. States were required to provide training for individuals to ensure that youth in foster care are accounted for at all times. The foster care system reported those who could not be accounted for and the factors that might have led the youth to run away. PSTSFA also required training for the foster care workers including social workers who are responsible for ensuring the welfare of the youth under their care. Therefore, providers

and professionals including social workers, psychologists, health care providers, foster care or child welfare providers, law enforcement professionals, foster and biological parents, and those who interact with the youth are responsible for increasing awareness that sex trafficking occurs in their communities (Clayton et al., 2013). The providers and community leaders are trained to identify and report incidences as well as respond to youth when they suspect incidences of trafficking in the community (Clayton et al., 2013).

PSTSFA and the Issue of Normalcy

Normalcy for the Foster Youth

In the context of the foster care system, normalcy means age appropriate experiences which expose foster youth to trainings, preparations, and experiences that are similar to those of the non-foster youth (PSTSFA, 2014). From Congress' perspective, normalcy for the foster youth is the youth's ability to fit into society and exhibit the same level of adjustment, job performance, educational attainment and independence as the non-foster youth. Normalcy is achieved when society or an organization cannot identify foster alumni because they do not exhibit negative qualities due to lack of training, education, or experience. The youth have acquired skills to qualify for positions within the organization or to perform their duties like their non-foster counterparts.

Adolescent Brain Function

Adolescence is the age when children become adults mentally, psychologically, hormonally and socially; it is a time when they go through transformation (Sharma et al., 2013). This period is when brain development occurs in the ventromedial prefrontal

cortex or the frontal lobes (Sharma et al., 2013). At this stage of prefrontal cortex development, the youths' genetic or social environment can influence their physical, mental, psychological and social development. The prefrontal cortex and hormonal stress can influence the maturation of the brain (Sharma et al., 2013). During this period, chemicals in the brain shift and sex hormones increase, creating periods of excitement and eagerness to try out adult roles and responsibilities (Sharma et al., 2013).

This period is when youth take risks and undergo mood swings and learn from their experiences and mistakes (Blair, 2013; Pokempner et al., 2015). Their brains remain under construction because they are undergoing puberty, which contributes to their physical, intellectual, emotional, and social changes (Sharma et al., 2013).

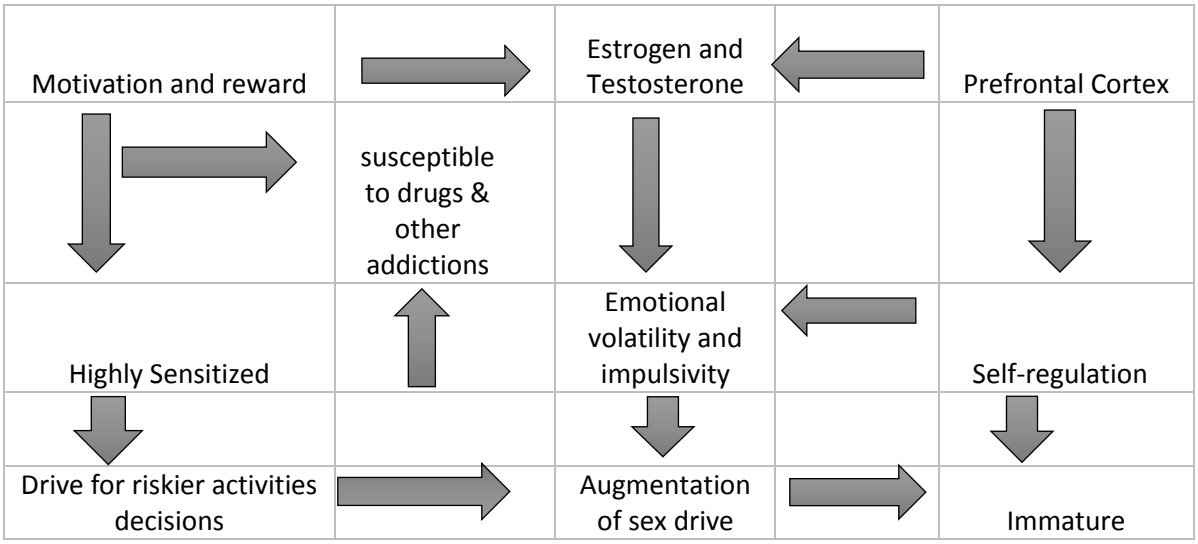

Figure 3. Adolescent brain function. Figure 3 is the prefrontal cortex, which governs the reasoning, decision-making, impulse controls and decision-making process, and influences the behavior of the youth (Sharma et al., 2013; Pokempner et al., 2015). The figure depicts how the adolescent brain functions irrespective of whether they are within the foster care system or not.

Importance of Brain Development to Achieving Normalcy

When the prefrontal cortex develops, the youths learn, develop, and solidify the skills they have learned. This is the period when participation in different social skills is important because the sphere of influence and ideas about themselves widens, and they develop emotional security (Pokempner et al., 2015). They participate in routine activities for psychological development, and the choices that they make affect and determine their behavior patterns and life choices (Crockett & Crouter, 2014; Pokempner et al., 2015).

Role of Foster Care Providers to the Developing Youth

Setting boundaries: At this stage, adult support and supervision is vital to provide and help define appropriate boundaries that would lead to successful transition into wholesome and healthy adulthood. Adult support and supervision also provide the youth with necessary emotional developmental support that ensures the youth are functioning at the same level as their non-foster counterparts. This is when non-foster youth explore, learn from experiences, make mistakes and learn from their mistakes (Berzin et al., 2014; Unrau, 2011). They formulate and learn from their social network as well as parents, peers, and the communities (Sharma et al, 2013). PSTSFA's instruction for states, local governments, and implementers of the law is to provide foster youth the same opportunities for similar experiences (PSTSFA, 2014).

Formulation of social networks: When youth go through these changes, they depend on caregivers and family members including parents, friends, the community, teachers and peers, and they formulate social network systems that provide the context for activities (Hill & Tisdall, 2014). They invest in relationships with others through trust and expand

on their social networks in schools, extracurricular activities, clubs, meetings, participation in community events and activities, and lifelong emotional relationships (Pokempner et al., 2015).

Formation of social identity: The non-foster youth develop their social identity from their parents and peers, and their identity results from their ideals of how they should behave and what the society requires of them. Their parents are the role models that influence their perception of themselves and their self-image (Falck, Heblich, & Luedemann, 2012). However, the foster youth do not have a parental sphere of influence because they are under the leadership and guidance of the state, the local government, and the foster care system (Berzin et al., 2014; Cunningham & Diversi, 2012).

Stability and sphere of influence: Foster youth do not have the the consistency, stability, and parental or family influence, so instead, they learn to explore and gain knowledge of themselves, their identities, and their interpretations of the changes they experience by themselves (Von Korff & Grotevant, 2011). Implementation of PSTSFA of 2014 will provide normalcy for youth in the foster care system, and it will widen the sphere of influence for them. They will learn how to make social connections, to gain interpersonal skills, and to develop healthy relationships with their peers and their communities. They will be able to experience the challenges of adjustments from their experiences with peers, families, coaches, and the community with which they interract and their social connections and networks.

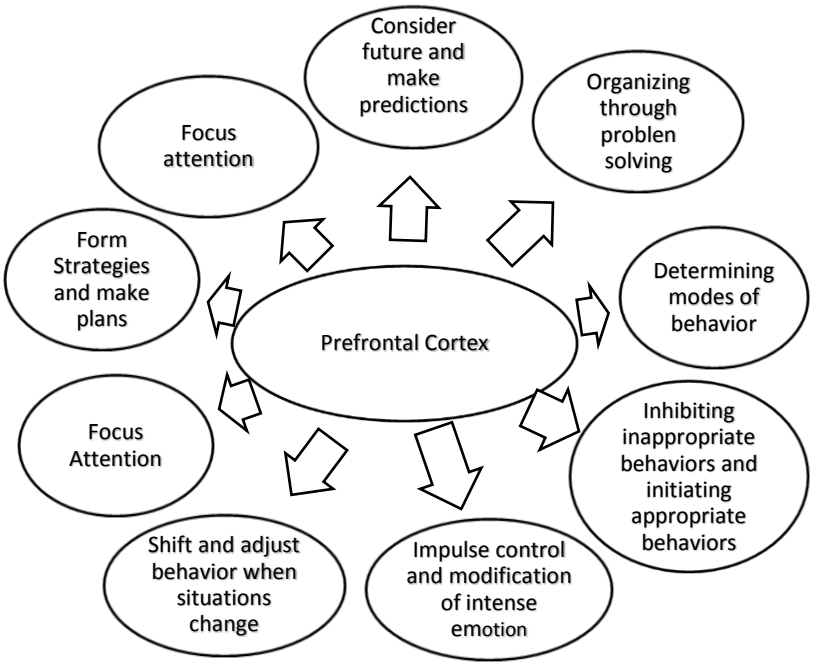

Figure 4. Impact of providers on adolescent brain function. This illustrates the role foster care providers can have on foster youth brain function and contributing to the youth's attainment of normalcy (Pokempner et al., 2015).

Availability of Funds to Provide Normalcy for Foster Youth

In order to provide normalcy of youth in foster care and to ensure they are at the same skill, education and experience levels as the non-foster youth, Congress provided funds for the youth in foster care. In previous policies, Congress expanded and reformed Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, a law that was designed to prepare the youth for transition when they were 18 years old (Social Security Act 477, U.S.C. 677).

In 1999, Congress enacted the FCIA of 1999 and doubled the funds allocated to foster care from $70 million to $140 million a year. The reason was to provide a broad framework to reform and provide services that would effectively meet the needs of the foster youth and enable states and local governments to coordinate and broaden the

programs that were available to them (FCIA, 1999). To achieve this mission, it established the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) which provides states with dedicated funding stream for the independent living program for children and youth. This funding was to cover the cost of room and board for youth that are 16 to 21 years old (FCIA, 1999). It broadened the services that states could render to help youth successfully transition to independence up to age 21 to include education, training, employment and financial support; states could spend up to 30 percent of their CFCIP allocation for room and board for former foster youth (FCIA, 1999).

In 2001, Congress allocated $60 million dollars to the state for voucher purposes, aimed at developing and assisting the youth with the skills necessary to lead independent and productive lives (Stoltzfus, 2012). In 2008 Congress extended entitlement funding under Title IV of the Social Security Act to age 21 (Courtney, Hook & Lee, 2012). However, in formulating PSTSFA, Congress recognized that irrespective of the existing laws and funding, the youth in foster care still lagged in age-appropriate activities compared to the non-foster youth. Congress addressed this lag by providing additional $3 million under the Title IV-E Independent Living Program beginning in 2020 for youth who remained in care until they were 18 years old.

PSTSFA and the Issue of Education to Foster Youth

Like non-foster youths, foster youths are entitled to education, and in Massachusetts their right to go to school extends until their 22nd birthday. They may be able to remain in their school even if they move to a different town. Like the non-foster youth, they are entitled to attend a higher education or vocational institution using the Foster Child Grant

Program and the Education and Training Voucher Program (FCIA, 1999; FCSIAA, 2008; PSSFA, 2001). However, although Congress enacted these laws, over 50% of aged out young adults are still unemployed, 40% experience homelessness, and the majority of them live below poverty level (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Stott, 2012). Youth in foster care lag in academics because there is no system of tracking their performances. They lag in reading skills and core competencies including writing, and academic, and social-emotional adjustment (Pears et al., 2011).

Educational Identify and Personality Traits

The youth lose the personality traits and educational identity that will contribute to their academic progress and achievement; they also lose the opportunity to develop and explore the big five personality traits including neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Klimstra, Luyckx, Germeijs, Meeus, & Goossens, 2011). Neuroticism is the tendency for the youth to experience distress, and extraversion is the tendency to enjoy attention. Openness deals with curiosity, creativity, and imagination. Agreeableness deals with pro-social tendencies such as trust, modesty, and compliance, and conscientiousness deals with self-control (Crocetti, Klimstra, Hale III, Koot, & Meeus, 2013; Klimstra et al., 2011).

Foster youth are at a higher risk of later reading difficulties because there is no form of intervention when they lag behind in their studies, and there is no continuous assessment or evaluation to ensure they are on par with their non-foster counterparts (Pears et al., 2011). A number of the youth who complete high school are not motivated

to obtain a college degree because they are not academically, emotionally, and mentally prepared due to the removal from their homes and families.

Education and the Development of Transition Plans

In 2014, Congress formulated PSTSFA so that youth 14 years and older could participate in developing transiton plans for their future (PSTSFA, 2014). Congress hoped that this policy would reduce the challenges of foster youth, including absenteeism, expulsions, and disconnection from the school system (Cheung, Lwin, & Jenkins, 2012; Gustavsson & MacEacron, 2012; Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012). The purpose of this research will be to explore, enrich our knowledge, and enhance our understanding of the challenges faced by Massachusetts foster care providers in their implementation of PSTSFA. Implementing the policy would ensure that the youth develop and acquired educational and vocational identity because they would have the opportunity to visit post-secondary and vocational institutions, as well as intern in various professional organizations (PSTSFA, 2014).

Implementers Challenges With PSTSFA's Sex Trafficking Laws

The hidden nature of the criminal activity makes it very difficult for the foster care providers and the community to report instances of sex trafficking in their communities. Criminals who exploit and victimize the youth have learned to conceal their criminal activities (Cho et al, 2014; Lee, 2013). As communities, organizations, law enforcement and individuals become aware of the enormous impact of sexual victimization, criminals have learned to obscure their advertisement sites, and thereby have concealed their activities (Hardy, Compton, & McPhatter, 2013). Because of this,

implementers of PSTSFA cannot readily identify the sites and the criminals for prosecution.

A number of foster youth who are sexually victimized or exploited perceive sex trafficking as a means to an end**.** They are cajoled into believing it's a transaction and an exchange for their primary needs, while the exploiter's motive is to generate illicit income and make profit (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2013); reporting will eliminate their source of income (Marcus & Curtis, 2014). Because of this false perception, the victims do not identify themselves as victims, and they live and operate under a pimp who coerce them into believing they might lose all of the benefits of the exchange if they report or admit to being trafficked. Their reality is the world in which they live, and they see the enforcer of the sex trafficking laws as a hindrance to their progress (Marcus & Curtis, 2014).

The youth who run away from the foster care system see sex trafficking as the only option available to them; they see it as a viable source of income and the most efficient way to support themselves, and they are therefore not willing to give it up. Because the youth see it as a lucrative business and an easy way to earn income, when they attain 18 years, they become the pimp, and sustain the unending cycle of victimization (Marcus & Curtis, 2014; Marcus, Horning, Curtis, Sanson, & Thompson, 2014). The youth perceive it as a promotion from one level to another; they begin as underage who eventually grow out of it, graduate to assistant pimp and later rise to the level of a pimp. At this point, they grow through the chain and become the boss (Marcus

& Curtis, 2014; Marcus, Thomas, & Horning, 2014), a position they are usually not willing to give up or abandon.

Criminals initiate their victims into sex trafficking by making fraudulent promises including offers of marriage, employment, and better life. Therefore, in lieu of those promises as their goals, they will not report the victimization for fear of jeopardizing their future and losing their objectives or goals (Hardy et al., 2013). The criminals may also coerce the victims using such threats as serious harm, forced physical restraint, and abuse, and in many cases, the criminals force the victims to retain the way of life by enduring beating, rape, threats, confinement and constraints (Hardy et al., 2013; Heil & Nichols, 2014).

Youth who are trafficked are often too afraid to come forward for fear of reprisal and victimization. Research has revealed that the youth frequently endure drug abuse, sexual abuse, and maltreatment from the pimps and clients and are threatened with more assaults and even death if they report the predicament (Diaz et al., 2014; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2013; Rafferty, 2013). The youth who are sex trafficked and the pimps sign or agree to confidentiality restrictions, and therefore, will uphold their position of non-reporting in adherence the clause (Marcus & Curtis, 2014). For youth who run away from the foster care system, homelessness creates a perceived need to engage in and exchange sex for shelter, money and education. The youth view the funds from prostitution as a way to support themselves, especially because they do not possess any other skills (Mitchell et al., 2013) and are afraid to lose their only source and means

of livelihood. Because of that, law enforcement cannot identify the sex workers or the traffickers (Marcus & Curtis, 2014).

Implementers' Challenges With Youth Achieving Normalcy

Successful implementation of any policy implementation depends on collaborative efforts and relationships between the implementers. Lack of coordination among them could make the intent of the policy unattainable (Morçöl, 2013; Tilbury, 2014). There must be a consensus and unity from all who are involved to ensure successful transition to adulthood because the lack of an integrated and unified program can become a challenge to the implementation of the policy (Fiestras-Janeiro et al., 2011; Zhao et al., 2010). When providing normalcy for youth, inability of the implementers to ensure the development of clear and uniform practices that are geared toward positive changes in the youth could be a challenge to policy implementation (Jensen, Johansson, & Löfström, 2012). For instance, in the unified system, the law enforcement entities are supposed to provide the caregivers with training that will help them identify instances of sex trafficking (PSTSFA, 2014). However, if the training is not provided to the providers or implementers, and they have a fear of reprisal or legal action against them by biological parents or the foster care system, their ability to provide the services the foster youth need could be hindered (PSTSFA, 2014; Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

Caregivers are not empowered in anyway as legal custodians of the youth in their care. This lack of authority could present a challenge in policy implementation. The caregiver are the youths' primary contacts, therefore, unless they have reasonable and prudent parental authority, they cannot exact any meaningful beneficial control over the

youth (Crocetti et al., 2013). Caregivers are reluctant to be involved with the youth for fear of legal action. The caregivers might not want to exercise any authority that might jeopardize them as the caregivers or the youth because they are afraid to take risks (Pokempner et al., 2015).

The absence of a monitor to evaluate the successful implementation of the policy could be a challenge. The lack of interaction between the formulation and implementation creates a gap that could present a challenge to implementation (Jensen et al., 2012; Pokempner et al., 2015). For instance, the law expects the legal system to provide the youths with their rights, to ensure they understand those rights, and to participate in their transition planning. However, if the lawyers are not involved with that aspect of the law to ensure that each implementer enforces their specific sections, the implementation will not be successful.

One of the challenges of the implementation of this law is the absence or lack of evaluation of the implementation process. There is no provision to evaluate the input, process, or the outcome of the law. If the foster system and the implementers do not evaluate and appraise the outcome of the implementation as well as the implementers on a regular basis, it might be impossible to determine the success of the law and the success of the implementation process (Jensen et al., 2012; Pokempner et al., 2015).

The regulations within the foster care system hindered the foster care providers from exerting authority regarding the foster youth. This hindrance prevented the foster youth from participating in the same activies as non foster youth and created a bottleneck that foster care providers could not overcome. As a result of fear of liability associated

with potential injury of the foster youth, they were not allowed to participate in sports and other activities like the non foster youth (Shireman, 2015; Simmel, 2012). The same restrictive child welfare policies that were designed to keep the foster youth safe hindered them from working summer jobs, playing in school bands, or even getting drivers license (Pecora, Whittaker, Maluccio, & Barth, 2012).

Implementation Challenges With Providing Adequate Education to Foster Youth

In Massachusetts, one of the challenges of implementing the law is availability of resources. The minimum number of youth assigned to a social worker is about six, and because of that, the social worker cannot devote sufficient time to each youth as required. The social workers cannot monitor the youths in their care to make sure that schools and other service providers provide the services that each youth needs (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). Because of lack of resources, youth do not have the opportunity to participate in civic engagements and are not involved in nor have opportunities to influence decisions in their communities. They do not have the opportunity to participate with adults to address collective issues (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012). Because of lack of resources, before transitioning from foster care, the caseworkers are constantly changing, and the instability usually results in a negative outlook and outcome in the youths' academic achievements.

Creating Identity for Foster Youth by Foster Care Providers

The existing policies that Congress enacted between 1999 and 2008 specified the provision of education, training, and financial assistance to youth in foster care, and in PSTSFA, Congress epowered the youth to participate in developing their transition plans

(PSTSFA, 2014). However, Congress expects each state to forumlate its own legislation andprocedures for implementation of the policy as well as to provide the youths with details regarding their rights. Congress expects them to understand their options regarding the required qualifications to attend post-secondary or vocational institutions or other choices that they will need to make to adjust in this economy (Crocetti et al., 2013). Understanding their options will create a conscious awareness of work, the necessity to work, and to not depend on the society to provide their needs (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011).

Identity and Its Importance

Identity is the relationship between an individual's perceived self and the environment or the community in which he or she lives. A foster youth's parents, caregivers and other members of the community are the first to perceive his or her identity. As the youth grows older, the perception of his or her identity broadens, and the youth is able to see himself or herself as an integral part of a web of relationships (Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Van Petegem, & Beyers, 2013).

The youths' development becomes part of their identity, their conception of what they want to do, and who they want to become in the future (Stets & Serpe, 2013). They learn skills based on this perception and formulate their transition plans based it, with the guidance of their families, teachers, friends, peers, social workers, and their entire community (Flum & Kaplan, 2012). Unless the youths integrate and overcome the real and perceived constraints and participate in everyday activities that prepare them for adulthood, they might not take charge of their opportunities to cultivate accurate

interpretations of their situations. The providers are therefore tasked with providing the developmentally and mentally appropriate opportunities that will help the youths in their developmental, vocational, individual and social identities (Pokempner et al., 2015).

The Collaborative Effort of the Providers

The implementers, working together in coalition, provide the youths with the opportunities to develop affirmation, to adjust to different cultures and perceptions, to adapt to mental and sociocultural perception of themselves, and to cultivate social capital by developing social networks (Flum & Kaplan, 2012; Pokempner et al., 2015; Porfeli & Lee, 2012). The implementers work in coalition to ensure that they provide foster youth access to resources and networks to develop healthy relationships, trust for others, participation in community activities, and an expansion of their web of interactive support which provides necessary mentors. Implementers help the youths in their identity formation and learning through motivation and engagements with their parents, teachers, social workers, peers, communities and occupations or careers of their choice (Pokempner et al., 2015; Porfeli & Lee, 2012).

Using PSTSFA to Provide Occupational Identity to Foster Youth

Occupational identity is occupational awareness of self about various career choices that are available to the youth. Occupational identity is useful because it creates a perception of occupational interest that links the youth's interest to the different professions that are available. Occupational identity plays a motivational role in a youth's readiness to choose a particular occupation, so it becomes the youth's career route (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Forming an occupational identity in youth is critical

because it creates a subjective awareness of the occupational path that are available to the youth.

Applying Game Theory

It would seem that if game theory is applied during the implementaion of PSTSFA, youth may have been provided opportunities that might not be available to them otherwise. Policy makers might be able to identify areas where the youth lag and require information and development (Pokempner et al., 2015). As youth integrate into the society by participating in sports, after school jobs, and clubs and participate in planning their transition plan, they learn about the options that are available to them after they age out of foster care and transition to adulthood (Andersson & Kalman, 2012; Marcus & Curtis, 2014; Newby, 2012). The youths' experiences working with the implementers increase their awareness and interest in different vocations and professions, so they are able to identify with vocations that they would not have access to otherwise (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). The awareness of the professions increases commitment to self-chosen occupational goals and values and prepares them for a promising future.

Characteristics of Occupational Identity

Occupational identity depends on continuity and is important for the youth in foster care because it characterizes the changes they will experience as they transition to adulthood. Towards when the adolescent transitions to adulthood, occupational identity becomes a period of occupational continuity and then fills the future with high hopes and expectations. Working with policy implementers, the youth are able to understand changes in the economy and to choose occupations that represent the societal needs. They

are able to be trained for careers and professions that reflect the economic needs which could translate into future careers. The state of an economy determines the available occupations and economic structures, and the prevailing occupations within the economy should influence the choices of the children.

Youth's Contribution to the Successful Implementation of PSTSFA

Youth can make significant contributions to the direction of his or her future and in the formulation of occupational identity and professional choices, which can lead to changes in the youth's self-perception and perception about his or her roles, abilities and capabilities (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Occupational identity creates a sense of uniqueness, passion, positive self-image, and a sense of meaning in adopting long-term career and occupational prospects (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). The youth identifies with professions that will be sources of income, as well as motivation to be employed instead of depending on the society.

Occupational identity is important for career development and creates a sense of control over career choices because it creates self-occupational knowledge and identity (Sinclair & Carlsson, 2013). Career identity helps the youth to achieve a sense of direction and meaning and establishes a framework for occupational goals. Youth are motivated to graduate high school and attend academic and vocational institutions because of the sense of purpose and desire to work that a career identify creates (Agirdag, Huyst, & Van Houtte, 2012; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Occupational identity creates self-assessment and a desire for direction and a productive future. It also allows for a psychosocial adjustment and well-being that motivates them to transition from foster care

without participating in illegal activities, but instead enjoying life satisfaction and adjustment. Adolescence is the stage when the identity formulation begins, and their experiences in formulating occupational experience can be useful in their ability to formulate stable self-representations of themselves.

Functions of the State Legislators in the Success of PSTSFA

Massachusetts legislators play a crucial role in ensuring that the state and local governments and foster care providers implement PSTSFA successfully. If the providers are not collaborative in their effort, and the state is unable to monitor and update its procedures to the required standards of PSTSFA, the implementation process would not succeed (U.S. Department of HHS et al., 2012). Explained below are some of the responsibilities of the state in ensuring the success of the law and the successful transition of youth from the foster care system into adulthood.

The states ensure that the foster care system provides adequate age appropriate services to the youth in foster under its care and ensures there is collaboration between the different child welfare providers and the various communities. The collaboration effort by Congress, states and various agencies and communities, if successful, aligns with the tenets of the game theory (ACF, 2012; Colman, 2013; PSTSFA, 2014; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). The states also ensure funds are provided to enforce legislation that supports programs and services that the youth receive as specified in the law. They also address the misconceptions about the child welfare system and provides up-to-date information to the communities about the needs of the foster care agencies (ACF, 2012; Ichiishi, 2014; PSTSFA, 2014; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). In

addition to these, states provide specialized training to the foster providers including the biological and foster parents of the youth, operate a nationwide information system or database about missing foster youth, and provide up-to-date information to the community and law enforcement agencies (PSTSFA, 2014; Roumboutsos & Kapros, 2008; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944).

States engage and update communities with policy changes, address concerns, and provide responses to challenges encountered while providing services to foster youth. States meet with families and communities and involve them in the implementation process (PSTSFA, 2014; Roumboutsos & Kapros, 2008). States increase networking opportunities among providers and utilize their input in the changing process to ensure they succeed in their roles in the implementation process (ACF, 2012; PSTSFA, 2014). They engage providers frequently and routinely and include and engage the foster youth in the implementation of the law in which they are the central focus. States set strategic plans for attaining the goals of PSTSFA and review and evaluate the plan based on changes in the needs of the foster youth and the providers (ACF, 2012; PSTSFA, 2014; Roumboutsos & Kapros, 2008).

Summary

Chapter 2 presented a literature review of PSTSFA. The chapter presented literature search strategies and the key search terms. In addition to that, public policy process was explained, and the theoretical framework that was used was explained as well. The chapter discussed the rational for utilizing game theory as the theoretical framework observing that the theory provided a conceptual framework that is relevant to

establishing the relationship between foster care providers, the foster care system, and the policy itself. In spite of the existence of the law, results of research show that less than 50% of those who transition each year graduated from high school, less than 5% graduated post-secondary school, and two-thirds struggle to hold a job (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Stott, 2012).

Youth who transitioned from the foster care system also experience a higher rate of interpersonal and emotional challenges and a high dropout rate for high school (Krebs et al., 2013; Osgood et al., 2010; Yates & Gray, 2012). The youth experienced poor school adjustment, especially because of poor reading skills and behavioral adjustments, and lack of coordination among service systems including the schools and the foster care system (Pears et al., 2011; Osgood et al., 2010). Also discussed in this chapter is a detailed explanation of elements or factors of PSTSFA including sex trafficking and the implementation challenges associated with protecting the youth from victimization and recommendations for addressing the challenges. In the chapter, there was an explanation of the term normalcy, including the challenges providers encounter in ensuring that they implement PSTSFA. Based on existing studies, there were recommendations that are not inclusive, but they are a stepping-stone to formulating corrective measures. A detailed explanation of youth identity formulation and education was also provided in this chapter.

Chapter 3 will provide the details of the study including the research design, rationale for the choice of design, description of the population as well as the dependent and independent variables. The chapter also provides details about the sampling

procedures, recruitment and data collection methods, and the research instrument utilized in the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Congress enacted the PSTSFA in 2014 to bridge the disparity between foster youth and nonfoster youth in the coping skills of the latter group before they transition to adulthood. Focusing on foster care providers who provide services to foster youth between 13 and 17 years of age, the purpose of this research is to explore, understand, and predict the challenges faced by foster care providers in their implementation of PSTSFA in Massachusetts. The preceding chapter focused on the literature review of the challenges that foster care providers face in their attempt to provide services to the foster youth under their care. In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology that I used to examine the challenges that foster care providers encounter during their implementation of PSTSFA.

Research Question

This study was guided by the following question: What are the perceived challenges that Massachusetts foster care providers face while implementing PSTSFA to foster youth between 13 and 17 years of age?

Open-ended survey questions are discussed below as well as in Appendix C.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design that I used to answer the research question as well as enhance the understanding of the challenges faced by Massachusetts foster care providers in their implementation of PSTSFA was of a phenomenological nature. In phenomenology, individuals tell stories to elucidate shared experience that constituted and shaped them (Bamberg, 2012; Gergen, 2014; Loh, 2013); they used stories to make sense of the

experiences (Barkhuizen et al., 2013). Phenomenological inquiry illuminates the experiences of those who are affected by challenges, problems, and plights (Bamberg, 2012; Gergen, 2014).

In this research, the foster care providers were able to narrate their experiences with implementing PSTSFA. Their narration focused on a common meaning and the aspect of the law that changed the foster care system, including documenting and protecting at risk sex trafficked youth, supporting normalcy for youth in foster care, and reporting information on sex trafficked youth (Creswell, 2013). Other aspects of the law include ensuring reasonable and prudent parenting standards for foster parents, improvement opportunities and supporting permanence for youth, and empowering states to find and respond to youth who run away from foster care (PSTSFA, 2014).

The phenomenological method was the most accurate research design for exploring the challenges faced by foster care providers in their implementation of PSTSFA as it focused on everyday experiences. In this research, the concepts of the challenges that Massachusetts foster care providers encounter in their implementation of the law is a common phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The experiences of foster care providers are concrete, therefore, using the phenomenological design presents a basis for developing a description of the experiences for all of the individuals in the research (Creswell 2013; Gergen, 2014; Loh, 2013; Paschen & Ison, 2014; Patton, 2015). Phenomenology may offer a better and deeper holistic approach to understanding how implementing PSTSFA directly affected or impacted the participants who lived the experiences (Creswell, 2013; Paschen & Ison, 2014).

In phenomenology, the cognitive representation and narrative of the population play a unique role in applying the past to the future. One function of the design was that it specifically focused on the experiences of the individual surrounding the phenomenon and the ways the individual makes sense or meaning of their world (experiences) (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). The phenomenological research design served the unique role of bringing order by organizing the thoughts of the individuals (Creswell, 2013). The use of phenomenology illuminated the life of the provider through the use of open-ended survey questions, which were structured in a way that the readers were able to enter into the world and capture the perspectives of the implementers or the foster care providers (Patton, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

The role of the qualitative researcher was to carry out the entire research from the data collection stage through data analysis. Rigor was applied in this study (Whiteley, 2012), and since as the researcher, my action influenced how the study was conducted, I was mindful of the dependability and reliability of the research (Kreceva, 2015). I formulated the instrument of the data collection and was conscious of the need to give voice to the participants and report their authentic responses (Hendereson & Baffour, 2015). It was important that I possessed a sense of intellectual honesty, was conscious of the ethical and intellectual integrity of the study and was ready to take responsibility for decisions regarding addressing ongoing biases (Tartarini, 2016; Wang, Hsieh, 2013). As a researcher, I displayed the uttermost honesty regarding my data collection and analysis, and I applied intellectual integrity in my interaction with the participants (Colman, 2003).

This was accomplished by providing accurate information to the participants, providing them with the consent form, and protecting their anonymity. I ensured that I gathered relevant data that will be crucial to ensuring data validity and sound and reliable research outcome (Gelling, 2014). The instrument for collecting the data was formulated to address the research question, methodology and the theoretical framework of the study (Colman, 2003; Gelling, 2014; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944).

After the instrument was formulated, I recruited two expert reviewers within the foster care system to review the instrument and provide feedback. After editing the questions based on the experts' feedback, I ensured the participants who responded to the questions were provided details of the research before signing the consent forms (Patton, 2015). I ensured that out of respect for the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants that the survey questions were geared towards obtaining responses to the research question (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). My position determined the perspective from which the participants' experiences are conceptualized, connected to the theoretical framework, and devoid of bias reporting (Patton, 2015; Tartarini, 2016). My role was to respect the open-ended survey process and to guarantee the information I solicited represented the true experiences of the participants (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015; Tartarini, 2016). The data collected during the survey was to be stored and preserved in my laptop and secured with a password or lock to ensure the integrity of the data was not compromised (Patton, 2015). Printed copies of the participants' responses that were used during the data analysis were shredded after use in compliance with the university requirements.

To ensure I possessed the necessary skill to analyze the data and draw unbiased inferences, I applied codes that come together from particular to general and connected them to provide meaning to the reader (Fink, 2000; Miles et al., 2014). I verified the data analysis to ensure the validity and reliability of the results by ensuring that the results were in line with the descriptions of the participants (Miles et al, 2014; Patton, 2015). A researcher determines how much to report of the participants' responses and the focus of the participants' responses; therefore, the researcher plays a crucial role in the ethical viability and the integrity of the research (Fink, 2000; Gelling, 2014; Patton, 2015; Tartarini, 2016; Whiteley, 2012). When the analysis was complete, I ensured the reporting of the results and conclusion covered the entire data collected and analyzed and not just specific predetermined sections that suited me (Fink, 2000; Patton, 2015).

In this research, before the data was collected, my role was to apply and practice epoché and bracketing (Creswell, 2013). Epoche and bracketing is a method whereby I suspend all judgements about my knowledge of PSTSFA until after the data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013). This technique increased my alertness regarding this topic, eliminated any form of biases in this research, captured the experiences of the participants, and understood their knowledge about their involvement with the foster care system and PSTSFA (Patton, 2015). Using open-ended survey questions, my responsibility was to provide a framework in which the participants could respond honestly and accurately answer the research questions while opening their world of experiences to me (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Methodology

This research was qualitative in nature, which was useful in understanding human emotion and feeling towards the policy under review (Janesick, 2015; Patton, 2015). Applying the qualitative methodology was useful in understanding emotional responses, including frustrations, acceptance, and adaptability (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Maxwell, 2013). In this research, using qualitative methodology was useful in obtaining sufficient information in predicting the challenges that foster care providers encounter in their implementation of PSTSFA.

Population for the Study

The population that responded to the open-ended survey in this study included foster care providers who provide services to foster youth between 13 and 17 years of age. The participants that responded to the survey were over 18 years old and have provided services to the foster youth since 2014 when the PSTSFA was enacted by Congress.

A purposeful sampling method was the used to select a sample of foster care providers. The purposeful sampling method is a tool that researchers use in purposefully obtaining information-rich data from four main subgroups that provide services to foster youth in Massachusetts (Yang & Banamah, 2014). The subgroups include foster parents GAL, foster parents, CASA, and social or case workers and managers (Bamberg, 2016; Paschen & Ison, 2014). Using facebook, I submitted letters of invitation and participation, which included the survey link containing the open-ended survey questions link (refer to Appendix C) to various organizations' Facebook administrators. As directed

in the websites of a few organizations I visited, I also emailed the letters of invitation and participation that included the survey link to members of organizations. Indivicuals heard of the survey by word of mouth and contacted me by by e-mail to request letters of invitation, and I responded by emailing them a letter of invitation containing the survey link.

Sample Size and Rationale

The sample size that was used in this study was 18 participants which is ideal for a phenomenological study in which between 5 and 25 participants are recommended (Creswell, 2013). The rationale for the sample size was to obtain extensive and rich information that was detailed, had great depth in context and content, and provided extensive data saturation (Patton, 2015). The aim of the sample size in this research was to enhance the in-depth variation and context surrounding the experiences of the sample population (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015).

I e-mailed and telephoned various state and privately owned foster care providers that provide services to foster youth in Massachusetts. I also contacted organizations' administrations on Facebook and provided the letter of invitation and a link containing the survey question in Survey Monkey for employees who were interested in responding. DCF provided me with a list of offices with which it contracts to provide services to the foster youth in Massachusetts, and CASA provided me with the contact for Massachusetts CASA. I forwarded letters of invitation and participation to Massachusetts Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, Massachusetts CASA located in Boston, MA, DARE family services, a Boston chapter of DARE foster parents and

Communities for Peoples. Additional letters of invitation and participation were emailed to individuals who were not affiliated with the above listed organizations but who contacted me by email to express interest in responding to survey questions.

Instrumentation

The literature sources that were used as a guide to design the open-ended survey questions included information obtained from the studies and documents pertaining to foster care children and youth and policy implementation process. The sources include information from the Office of the Administration of Children and Families, Office of Health Policy Initiative, and the University of California, Berkeley. The survey instrument was reliable because it covered information that provided accurate results relating to the research question. The open-ended survey questions were not lopsided but covered the different aspects of the policy that are crucial to the successful implementation of PSTSFA (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Because the survey covered different aspects of the implementation process, it played a role in our understanding of the challenges that foster care providers face in their implementation of PSTSFA (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

The data collection instrument that was utilized in this research consisted of open-ended survey questions. In order to ensure the credibility of the research, I set aside my knowledge or assumptions about the topic and focused on the viewpoint of the participants (Patton, 2015; Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2015). When participants described their experiences, my duty was to present the participant's story without tainting the descriptions and without adding or subtracting information that the

participant did not provide (Sorsa et al., 2015). The survey questions aligned with the research question and theoretical framework, and in this dissertation, the questions were intentional to unravel and obtain information about participants' experiences (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

My role in the in-depth, open-ended survey was to inquire into the participants' experiences with sensitivity while staying aligned to the purpose of the study (Patton, 2015; Seidman, 2013). The survey questions were constructed in a way that the inquiry was conversational (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The questions were specific enough that they addressed the purpose of the research and conversational enough to eliminate any form of stress for the participants who responded to the survey (Patton, 2015). The open-ended survey questions did not include the "why" questions because that might be misconstrued as judgmental (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The questions gave respondents the opportunity to explain their experiences.

Data Collection

The key issues that qualified the participants for recruitment included their participation in providing services to foster youth in different capacities. A comprehensive explanation regarding the purpose of the study and the role of their participation in determining the challenges that they encounter in implementing PSTSFA was provided to the participants (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Janesick, 2015). Data was collected from participants in the organizations to whom I sent e-mails and Facebook invitations and provided copies of the letter of invitation.

During the data collection process, the anonymity of the participants was guaranteed because the research did not require respondents' personal information (Patton, 2015). Survey Monkey was instructed to allow only one response from an IP address and was also to block the IP addresses of the respondents. This proposed research was qualitative, and the participants responded to online open-ended survey questions regarding the services they provided to the foster youth and the challenges they face with the implementation of PSTSFA. The participants' identifying information was not required, instead for identification purposes only, they were referred to as Participant 1 – Participant 10 (Bryman, 2012; Blair, Czaja, & Blair, 2014). Written information that introduced the study as well as informed consent was provided to the participants on Survey Monkey. Each participant could only access the survey after they read and agreed to the consent form. If participants disagreed with the consent form, the survey was over and participant could not view the other questions.

Subject Matter Experts

Prior to data collection I had two subject matter experts assess the instrument. This allowed me to establish that the study was inquiry driven (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The subject matter experts that reviewed and responded to the survey questions provided feedback about the clarity, simplicity and answerability of the questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Patton, 2015). The subject matter experts assessed the level of difficulty of the questions and determined that their understanding of the questions reflected what was intended in the research (Seidman, 2013). Obtaining feedback about the survey questions before they were administered was important to enhance the reliability of the

instrument. Part of the instructions included a request for the subject matter experts to assess and make suggestions and provide feedback on the sections where they believed the questions required improvement (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

In this research, a triangulation method was utilized during the data collection stage (Patton, 2015). Triangulation is the use of multiple methods of data collection or analysis in research. It involves obtaining different perspectives on an issue (Roe, 2012). Researchers use triangulation to increase accuracy and achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). In triangulation, two or more methodological approaches, theoretical perspectives, data sources, investigators and analysis methods are combined to study the same phenomenon (Miles et al, 2014; Patton, 2015). Triangulation could be data triangulation, theoretical triangulation, investigator triangulation, and analysis triangulation (Patton, 2015). Theoretical triangulation is the use of multiple theories for the purpose of supporting or refuting results or as the use of multiple lenses to view a problem (Patton, 2015). The use of theoretical triangulation provides a broader and deeper understanding of the research problem (Miles et al, 2014; Patton, 2015). Investigator triangulation is the use of multiple investigators at any time during the research process (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Miles et al., 2014).

In this research, I applied multiple data triangulation as a validity procedure to achieve convergence among different sources of information (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). As a validity strategy, I focused on the participants' responses and the

explanations for the responses about the issues that they discussed (Patton, 2015). I also triangulated the written information with independent sources of information (Patton, 2015). I focused on written materials by participants, written materials from the foster care system and the PSTSFA to achieve triangulation (Carter et al., 2014; Miles et al., 2014; PSTSFA, 2014). Therefore, the open-ended survey questions were formulated to address the research question and achieve validity.

Data Management and Analysis

In qualitative research, the data tells the story, therefore, management of data includes obtaining, storing, analysis, and presenting the results of the analyzed data is very important and intentional (Patton, 2015). In this research, the collected data was analyzed using the Van Kaam (1959) phenomenological analysis. For Van Kaam (1959), the phenomenological analysis or the qualitative analysis of experience deals with when participants, in speaking about the challenges they face with implementing PSTSFA, express their awareness, which ultimately becomes conceptual knowledge. In this dissertation, in order for the participants to express their awareness and conceptual knowledge about PSTSFA, a process referred to as epoche or bracketing was applied during data analysis (Bednall, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Van Kaam, 1959). The reason why epoche or bracketing was applied was for me to set aside my perceptions, biases, or experiences, and allow the voices of subjectivity to emerge from the participants' personal accounts in their responses to the survey questions (Bednall, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2015).

Using this approach during and after the responses were obtained, documents including literature, journals, additional notes, transcripts, and other forms of data that were obtained were analyzed using various steps (Polkinghorne, 1989; Saldana, 2015; Van Kaam, 1959). In the first step, concepts that were obtained during the review of the relationship between the theoretical framework and the aspects of the law that are required to make changes in the foster care system were converted to codes. The codes were the themes upon which the questions were based, and they were used for the analysis (Saldana, 2015; Van Kaam, 1959). During the data analysis, emerging themes formed new codes that were assigned to participant responses that did not correspond with any assigned codes or themes (Saldana, 2015).

The second step entailed gaining a holistic grasp of the data that the participants provided based on two requirements: determining whether the phenomenological data contain experiences that constitute part of the study and coding the data devoid of bias (Janesick, 2015; Van Kaam, 1959). In this step, the focus included assigning codes to the various aspects of participants' descriptions of their experiences (Saldana, 2015). In the third step, descriptions that constituted similar experiences that had been assigned codes were identified and clustered together and assigned labels or categories (Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2015; Van Kaam, 1959). This step involved coding and categorizing or classifying the existing codes and grouping based on the participants' experiences (Saldana, 2015). This required multiple reviews in order to ensure all the aspects of the data were regrouped into easy-to-explain emerging patterns in the data analysis and code for common themes and patterns (Saldana, 2015; Van Kaam, 1959).

The final step entailed identifying components, performing final refinement of the categories, transferring the categories into themes, and expressing the results in statements in the light of the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Janesick, 2015; Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2015). This was the stage when the themes were transformed into meaningful units, and the redundant themes were eliminated. In this study, the interrelationship between the themes served to reflect the experiences of the foster care providers who responded to the survey and expressed their challenges with implementing PSTSFA (PSTSFA, 2014; Janesick, 2015).

Table 1

Coding Steps From 1 to 4

Steps	Details of the steps
1: Preliminary groupings	Data as presented by the participants. Concepts are converted to existing codes.
2: Holistic grasps	Experiences that constitute part of the study are assigned new codes to obtain common patterns.
3: Cluster codes and classify existing codes	Cluster of similar experiences and regrouping of codes to obtain common themes and patterns.
4: Final refinement	Transform themes into meaningful units and eliminate redundancy.

The data management and data analysis explained above was performed using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) NVivo 11 Pro by QSR International (Bazeley, 2007; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Saldana, 2015). The NVivo software was utilized to manage data by storing the raw data, rough notes, jotted ideas, and other pertinent data that was obtained in the course of the data collection (Bazeley &

Jackson, 2013). It was used to manage and query ideas because it provided access to theoretical knowledge that was generated during the course of the data collection and analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Saldana, 2015). NVivo software provided graphical models of ideas, concepts, codes, and themes that were built from the data. It revealed a relationship between the data and presented the outcome of the knowledge that was developed (Bazeley, 2007; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Saldana, 2015).

The table below is a representation of the coding framework that was used for this research. The table demonstrates alignment between the research questions, the theory, and the open-ended survey questions. Column 1 represents the objectives of game theory (parent codes), column 2 (child codes) represents the variables from quantitative research, which become the qualitative codes, and column three represents the research question or questions that depicting the codes.

Table 2

Preliminary Coding Framework

Parent code (Theory/Theme)	Child Code	Open-ended survey questions
Refrain from monopoly	Collaboration (GT-C)	4, 1, 3 and 6
Negotiation	Improvement in implementation	ALL
Communal cohesion	Communication	3, 4
Common agenda	Agency policy	ALL
Concerns	Funding	2, 7
Decision making (DM)	Challenges	9 and 5
Unitary will	Training	1 and 2

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative research is subjective because the researcher makes all the decisions regarding the the dataworks to ensure the quality of the study including the research construct, the research problem, research questions, theories, instrument and the data that is collected and analyzed which determines the accuracy of the results (Heale & Twycross, 2015). To achieve validity in a qualitative research, the survey instrument must be carefully constructed to measure what it is supposed to measure, and it should be constructed to align with the research questions (Patton, 2015). The questions were reviewed by subject matter experts to ascertain that the instrument was inquiry driven to determine its clarity, simplicity, and answerability by the participants (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Patton, 2015; Bardach & Patashnik, 2016).

The open-ended questions were administered based on appropriate and acceptable procedures. Prior to administering the questions, the participants were fully informed about the goals of the research, and they were provided with a consent form that they read and agreed with by responding “yes”, or disagreed with by responding “no” (Creswell, 2013; Janesick, 2015; Patton, 2015). If the participants agreed and responded “yes” to the consent form, they were able to take the survey. However, if the participants responded “no” to the consent form, the section ended, and the participant could not proceed. After the questions were published in Survey Monkey, appropriate protocol was observed at all times, including giving the participants the opportunity to respond to the questions, and if they were tired, to suspend and come back to complete it, giving the participants the opportunity to end the survey if they wished to discontinue (Maxwell,

2013; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). The credibility of the qualitative research depended mainly on the skills, competence and rigor of the research; therefore, I maintained absolute neutrality, was non-judgmental and non-prejudiced throughout the study to eliminate bias (Patton, 2015).

To achieve reliability, the instrument and data collected were connected to and consistent with the theory, and the results or outcome were applicable at comparative settings (Miles et al., 2014). More importantly, in qualitative research, policy studies should lead to positive and constructive action, and should be based on the outcome of the data collected and analyze (Miles et al., 2014). Whether or not policy makers use the results of my report, the outcome of this study should have a positive impact on the research field and public policy process and practice (Miles et al., 2014).

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations in this research were in two perspectives, responsibility to the participants and responsibility as a researcher. In regard to responsibilities to the participants, it was important to provide full disclosure including the goals and objectives or purpose of the research to the participants (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). The information provided to the participants was accurate enough for them to make informed decisions about their desire to participate in the study (Abed, 2015). The participants were aware that their participation was strictly voluntary, and that the researcher would respect their decision not to participate in responding to the survey (Miles et al., 2014). Participant numbers 1 to 10 were assigned to each participant based on when they submitted the survey. To safeguard anonymity, Survey Monkey did not include the

participants' names or email and IP addresses in their responses. Therefore, I did not know who responded to the survey. It was also important that the open-ended survey questions were not lopsided and were not formulated to solicit the desired responses (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015).

In regard to my responsibility, I ensured that I provide the participants with detailed information regarding the research on the letter of invitation before providing them the informed consent (Creswell, 2013). The letter of invitation and informed consent explained the purpose and nature of the study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The participants were also aware they did not have to agree to the consent form if they did not want to participate in the research, and if they decided to participate, the responses they provided were strictly based on their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

Summary

This chapter contained an explanation of the research problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. It also detailed the research methodology, design, and the rationale for the choice of design. It explained the research sample and sampling method that was utilized to obtain the sample. The chapter detailed the procedures for recruitment of the sample, participation, and data collection method that included the use of online open-ended survey questions.

Online open-ended questions were administered to 17 participants who were interested in providing responses, and an online consent form was provided to participants to agree with by checking "yes" or disagree with by checking "no." Checking

“yes” on the consent form opened the survey for participants and checking “no” ended the survey. Prior to administering the survey questions, two subject matter experts reviewed the questions to determine their level of difficulty. Data analysis software was utilized to analyze the data that was collected. Finally, the chapter explained validity and reliability, as well as ethical issues that could result in the research. It detailed methods that were applied to resolve the validity, reliability and ethical challenges in the research.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, enrich, and enhance understanding of the challenges that Massachusetts foster care providers who provide services for foster youth between the ages of 13 and 17 years old face in their implementation of PSTSFA of 2014. I explored the provisions of the policy that included the process for protecting at-risk sex trafficked youth, identifying and documenting, reporting instances of sex trafficking, and the provision of a timeline for reporting information on sex trafficked youth to law enforcement (PSTSFA, 2014, U.S. Department of State, 2015). Additonal provisions in the policy included providing a standard of care that ensured reasonable and prudent parenting standards, ensuring the availability of age or developmentally appropriate activities, and locating and responding to youth who run away from foster care. These provisions increased information dissemination on youth in foster care as a way to prevent their becoming victims of sex trafficking and providing normalcy for youth in foster care (PSTSFA, 2014).

The research question that guided and was used to explore the study was: What are the perceived challenges that Massachuestts foster care providers face while implementing PSTSFA to foster youth between 13 and 17 years of age? Game theory was used to explore the research question, and I constructed online open-ended questions to solicit responses from foster care providers including foster parents, social and case workers/managers, GAL, and CASAs. In this chapter, I report results of the responses from ten foster care providers and applied the game theory to analyze the data.

Setting

To address the research question, I administered 12 open-ended survey questions (Appendix C) to 17 Massachusetts foster care providers using SurveyMonkey. Prior to publishing and administering the questions in SurveyMonkey, I obtained IRB approval with approval assigned number 07-19-17-0426311. The initial contact with the providers was via letters of participation and invitation that were addressed to various organizations' Facebook administrators. The letters of invitation and participation requested responses to the open-ended survey and contained a link that respondents accessed to find SurveyMonkey. Emails were sent to organizations that did not respond to the Facebook contacts, organizations whose Facebook messages requested contacts by email and provided email addresses. Emails were also sent to organizations that did not have Facebook accounts and to individuals who heard about the survey through word of mouth and contacted me by email to request the survey, and individuals who have no affiliations with any of the above listed organizations.

I visited different offices that were affiliated to DCF and provided services to foster care. I provided them with copies of the letters of invitation and participation. In total, I sent out 54 emails, contacted 14 organizations via Facebook, and made 72 phone calls. Three of the organizations that declined to respond emailed back with an apology. One of the organizations, though has an affiliation to Massachusetts foster care system, was located in Connecticut. The two other organizations were placement services. Though the organizations were located in Massachusetts, they did not provide services to foster youth; instead, they connected foster parents looking to adopt foster children. To

protect the respondents of the survey, the survey response was anonymous, and personal information and IP addresses of the respondents were blocked when the participants responded. Because of this anonymity, participants could choose not to participate, or could change their minds and discontinue the survey at any time. SurveyMonkey assigned random numbers to each participant that responded, and deleted any participant's identifying information.

Demographics

There were 12 questions in the online open-ended survey questions (Appendix C). Four of the questions were demographic questions, and eight were open-ended survey questions. Participants were required to respond "yes' or "no" to the consent form to have access to the questions. If the participants responded "yes" to the consent form, they were able to view and respond to the other questions; however, if participants responded "no" to the consent form, the survey ended, and the other questions did not display. The first four questions were demographic questions, whereas the rest of the questions were based on seven preselected themes. The survey was administered to foster parents, social or case workers and managers, GAL, and CASAs. The four demographic questions were intended to determine that the participant had provided service to foster youth between 2014 when PSTSFA was formulated and the time the participant was responding to the survey. The other survey questions addressed such issues as training, funding, communication and collaboration, fear of reprisal or legal consequences, level of accountability, community awareness, and societal perception of the foster care system. The participants were also provided an opportunity to explain whether foster care

providers faced challenges providing services to youth and to make recommendations regarding how the challenges could be resolved.

Seventeen participants responded to the survey in SurveyMonkey. Seven of the participants responded "yes" to the consent form but did not respond to any of demographic and survey questions. Therefore, there was no way to determine the professional affiliation of the seven participants, and these seven were not included in the data analysis. One participant responded to the first eight questions but did not respond to Questions 9 through 12. The participant's responses to Questions 1 through 8 were included in the analysis. Of the number of participants who responded to the questions, six were social workers, one was a GAL, and three were foster parents (see Table 3). CASA did not respond to the survey although I contacted them through Facebook, numerous e-mails, and phone calls. A letter of invitation and participation that I sent to CASA's Facebook web administrator was acknowledged; however, no response was received from CASA.

Table 3

Years of Professional Affiliation and Number of Youth Served

Participant's profession	Number of participants
Foster parent	3
Guardians ad litem (GAL)	1
Social/case worker/manager	6
Court appointed special advocates	0

Date Collection

Data was collected online using Survey Monkey. I contacted participants by sending Letters of Invitation and Participation to the foster organizations' Facebook web administrators through Facebook. There was also invitation by word of mouth, and those who were interested contacted me by e-mail to request a letter of invitation which included the survey link. I emailed a few organizations that had protected Facebook pages but provided e-mail addresses to visitors who were interested in contacting the office. Participants who were interested in participating in the survey clicked the link to Survey Monkey and took the survey. Participants who could not respond to the survey in one sitting had the choice of going back to complete it before the deadline that was referenced on the letter of invitation.

The key issues that qualified the participants for recruitment included that they were over 18 years old, provided services for foster youth between the ages of 13 and 17 years old, and provided the services in the state of Massachusetts. A comprehensive explanation of the purpose of the study, and the participants role in determining and understanding the challenges that providers encounter in implementing PSTSFA was included in the consent form and the letter of invitation (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Janesick, 2015). After the participants read the letter of invitation, they determined whether they were qualified and/or wanted to continue to the survey. If the participants decided to continue, they were directed to the consent letter. Responding "yes" or "no" to the consent letter was key to determining whether the participant continued the survey or not. If the participants responded "no" to the consent form, that ended the survey;

however, if the participants responded "yes" to the consent form, they were able to view and respond to the open-ended survey questions.

Data Analysis

The data that was collected for this study was analyzed using Van Kaam's phenomenological analysis (1959). Van Kaam's phenomenological analysis deals with understanding what a situation means to a participant. When participants think or speak about their experiences regarding the challenges they face with implementing PSTSFA, they express their awareness and their understanding of what they experienced. The participants' awareness ultimately becomes conceptual knowledge, and the conceptual knowledge is their subjective or personal phenomena. Without trying to predict or control a situation, the researcher's role is to understand the participant's experiences through deduction, observation and verification. During the data analysis, in order for me to accurately deduce and corroborate the participants' awareness and conceptual knowledge about PSTSFA, I applied epoche or bracketing (Bednall, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Van Kaam, 1959). The use of epoche or bracketing required that I set aside my perceptions about the foster care system and the providers and allow subjectivity to emerge from the participants' personal accounts, as they responded to the survey questions (Bednall, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2015).

In analyzing the collected data, game theory was applied in the review of the research question and the analysis of the open-ended survey question themes. Game theory is an interactive decision-making strategy that can be used to develop economic behavior and understand human activity and interactive decision-making process

(McCain, 2010; Myerson, 2013). Depending on how members of a team utilize the rules, game theory can be applied to achieve economic success (Myerson, 2013). Game theory and the research question that formed the foundation of this research were used in the analysis of the data that was collected using open-ended survey questions. The reason was to explore and better understand the challenges impeding Massachusetts foster care provider's ability to implement PSTSFA as they provide services to foster youth between 13 and 17 years old.

Game theory utilizes individuals' or organizations' knowledge by providing specific choice of action to achieve maximum utility (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007; Wilson & Gowdy, 2013). The theory focuses on high efficiency by seeking strategic advantage through rational decision-making regarding the needs of the individuals affected – the foster youth (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). Using the game theory to address the research question, themes aimed at eliciting responses from foster care providers were developed. The themes that were formulated during the literature review included training, funding, communication and collaboration, level of accountability, fear of reprisal or legal consequences, and community awareness and societal perceptions of the foster care system (Pokempner et al., 2015).

The themes that explored the responder's depth of understanding of the challenges that foster care providers face as they provide services to foster youth were used to formulate open-ended survey questions. The hope was that the questions provided answers and lead to better understanding of the challenges that foster care providers encountered as they provided services to foster youth in Massachusetts.

After the questions were reviewed and approved, they were published in Survey Monkey. The participants were contacted using Facebook, visiting foster care offices, sending e-mails, and by word of mouth. A total of 17 participants responded to the survey; however, of that total, seven of the participants responded "Yes" to the consent question but skipped the rest of the questions and submitted the survey. The data analysis is based on the responses of the 10 participants who responded to more questions beyond the consent question. The period from which the open-ended survey questions were published and when the 17 responses were obtained was from September 25, through November 24, 2017.

After each participant responded to the survey in Survey Monkey, the responses were printed and reviewed. Sections pertinent to the research question, including portions that revealed emerging themes, were highlighted. After the 17 participants had responded to the survey, I downloaded the data directly from Survey Monkey into NVivo 11 Pro for analysis. Survey Monkey did not download the surveys for the seven participants who responded "yes" to the consent form but skipped the other questions.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

A researcher ensures a research is trustworthy by ensuring the data collected and analyzed meets the condition of credibility, dependability, and transferability (Anney, 2014). The credibility of this research is based on the fact that the finding accurately represents the participants' reality (Sarvimaki, 2014). Participants had the opportunity to express their feelings and views by writing and documenting their experiences as they responded to online open-ended survey questions. The words expressed opinions about

the challenges that each provider faces as they provide services to foster youth in Massachusetts. The credibility of this study was also verified by using triangulation of all sources of data collection (Patton, 2015). Participants from different professions including foster parents, GAL, and social or case workers or managers who provide services to foster youth, responded to sets of open ended online survey questions in Survey Monkey. Triangulation also ensured congruence between the research question, methodology, applicable theory, the data collection, and data analysis (Patton, 2015; Sarvimaki, 2017). During the data analysis, the responses of the participants were analyzed by correlating the applicable theory with the research question.

Dependability

To ensure the dependability of this research, I needed to set aside my knowledge or assumptions about the topic and focus on the viewpoint of the participant (Paton, 2015; Sorsa et al., 2015). The data collected was participants' documented responses which could not be changed, altered, or modified. As a result, quotes that were referenced in the data analysis were not my interpretation, but the participants' own words. When I published the survey questions in Survey Monkey, some of the rules that applied included obtaining one survey from one IP address to ensure one computer could not be used to submit multiple responses. The responses were anonymous; Survey Monkey stripped the e-mail addresses or personal information of the participants before they were published. Therefore, participants' responses were first person narrative and reliable. Also, the fact that the participants documented their responses eliminated the possibility of forgetting a

participant's response. Documented responses could not be altered or modified after the participants submitted the survey in Survey Monkey.

Results

As I read through the online open-ended survey questions, I considered the original themes that the questions were based upon and any new themes that emerged from the participants' responses. I was careful to ensure the questions were formulated to look for consistencies in the participants' responses or identify when a new theme evolved from existing themes. Table 4 below is a frequency table that details participant's responses using the previous or new identified themes.

Table 4

Frequency Table of Aggregate Participant Responses

Name	Frequency (*f* = n)
Fear of reprisal	12
Code of silence	11
Limited communication and collaboration	10
Absence of parental support	7
Fault finding	7
Lack of funding	7
Received training	7
Training contributes positively to services	6
Need for improvement in accountability	6
Lack of empowerment	5
Heavy workload	5
Lack of training	4
Neutral effect of training	4
Training not policy specific	4
Training required	4
Limited power of enforcement	3
Obstacle to training	2
Positive collaborative effort	2
Refusal to acknowledge problems	1

In order to gain an in-depth knowledge of the perception of the foster care providers and to provide them with opportunity to express their opinions regarding the challenges that they face when they provide services to foster youth, online open-ended survey questions were constructed under predetermined themes. The following details the responses that the providers including foster parents, GAL, and social or case workers and managers provided in response to the questions.

Training

The questions on training addressed the issue of whether the providers received training and the impact of the training on a participant's ability to implement PSTSFA. The reason for this question was to determine how conversant the providers were with the provisions of PSTSFA. The provisions that congress included in PSTSFA were: protecting children and youth at risk of sex trafficking, establishing reasonable and prudent parenting standards, and providing an adequate case and transition plan to enable foster youth to successfully transition into adulthood. Implementing these provisions required that the implementers were adequately trained at the level that was necessary to implement the provisions.

The question about training drew varied responses from the participants. Of the ten participants, three responded that they received minimal or limited training (*f=4)*, and seven responded that they received training. Six responded that the training they received impacted (*f*=6) their ability to provide services to foster youth, although, based on the responses, four participants said training was not PSTSFA specific (*f*=4). Moreover, in their responses, the participants recommended additional training in order for providers to

perform their duties (*f*=4). Participant 8, a social worker responded that "foster care services could improve with training sections for would be and existing foster parents," and Participant 3, a foster parent thought the foster care system was not providing "healthy social workers who are empowered with the common sense to help parents succeed."

In responding to this question, Participant 5 said he or she received training, however, the training did not impact the implementation of PSTSFA. That raised the question of whether this participant is conversant with the policy, because PSTSFA training is expected to be specific and different from what it was before PSTSFA was enacted. Participant 3 addressed the question on training when responding to fear of reprisal and legal consequence by saying "we have not had any training on sex trafficking issues." This response was perplexing because it was incongruent for a foster care provider to be using Preventing Sex Trafficking and Protecting Families Act of 2014 and yet not receive training on sex trafficking (PSTSFA, 2014; United States Department of State, 2015). One theme that emerged from participants' responses to the question on training and will be discussed in Chapter was policy specific training.

Availability of Funds

This question about funding was included as one of the survey questions because as part of the provision of PSTSFA, the providers' ensured that foster youth attain normalcy (PSTSFA, 2014). The providers make sure foster youth experience, participate in, and are exposed to the same recreational and civic opportunities that were available to non-foster youth and were part of PSTSFA (PSTSFA, 2014). The opportunities that

foster youth participate in include having sleepovers, attending proms, obtaining licenses, and participating in athletic activities and clubs (PSTSFA, 2014). For foster youth to participate in such activities, Congress allocated funds for providers; the goal of this question was to ensure that there was sufficient funds for the youth to meet the requirement of this PSTSFA provision.

Participants' responses regarding the issue of funds were mixed. Six of the participants' responses revealed funds was sometimes low for the providers to provide services (f =7), although from the responses, low funds did not seem to impact the services that the providers provided to the youth. All 10 of the participants believed the availability of funds did not impact the services they provided to the foster youth. Four of the participants explained why more funds were required in the foster care system. The participants responded that more funds were required to meet foster youths' basic needs. Participant 2 responded that more funds were required in the foster care system to equip the youth and meet their basic needs. Continuing, the participant explained the need for more funds in this manner:

> Those providing foster care to youth in the system are better equipped to meet youth's basic needs and provide safe shelter. Educational supports for foster parents is also key to ensuring that they are able to manage youth who have a history of trauma. Foster youth are in a safe housing and not on the streets with appropriate funding, available to access community supports. Low funding leaves foster care parents and youth in a difficult position.

Participant 3 explained that funding was a problem because the funds available were not sufficient to provide the programs that the youth needed. As part of the recommendation for improvement of services six of the 10 respondents recommended that the foster care system needed more funding. According to Participant 10, to achieve success in the implementation of PSTSFA, "foster care parents deserved more money to care for kids effectively," and Participant 2 recommended "improvement in funding, staff salaries, {and} accessibility to housing resources ones foster care youth have aged out to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation."

Communication & Collaboration

No organization can survive without communication and collaboration, and no policy can be enacted or implemented without the members' willingness to communicate and collaborate. The question on communication and collaboration was included as part of the survey questions to better understand the level and type of communication and collaboration that occur among the foster care providers. Implementing PSTSFA will only be successful if the team members including foster parents, GAL, CASA, and social or case workers, and the various organizations that manage the system communicate with each other.

In response to the question of communication and collaboration, seven participants said foster care providers said there was communication and collaboration (f = 7). However, the participant's responses to other questions contradicted the initial responses because on several parts of the survey, participants said there was limited communication and collaboration (f=10). Participants who said there was communication

and collaboration also explained that the communication was only among themselves, for instance foster parents with foster parents, or social or case workers with the assigned foster parents. Therefore, the communication and collaboration that the participants said existed was deliberately very restricted. Three participants responded that there was no communication or that the communication was minimal or limited. Participant 1 responded that there was "not much communication" and communication with CASA or GAL was not applicable. As shown below, Participant 2 responded that that communication and collaboration was minimal.

> Communication with foster care parents can be minimal. Youth in my care had the choice to involve foster care parents in services and supports having to do with their sexual health. Consent was not needed for HIV or STI testing for the population I worked with ages 14-18. Some state house advocacy for funding for homeless youth took place with the youth.

Participant 8, a social or case worker, responded that communication and collaboration was minimal and explained that communication was only with foster parents. Participant 8 had this to say: "limited communications with policymakers and local community leaders on foster care related matters. Communicates only with assigned foster parents." Participant 3 explained that there was communication using the resource that was provided to the participant. However, to Participant 3, the providers "are impacted in a negative way for being honest with the authority figure within the program." In response to the question of collaboration, Participant 3 explained that the foster care parents collaborate to provide support to one another, however communication with social

workers was time specific because “once they {case workers} turned off their phones at 5pm, they were no longer available to assist, and this is an issue because a parent is a 24/7 role.”

Of the seven participants who responded that they communicated, Participant 4 responded that there was communication with other foster care providers including policy makers, and their local communities; Participant 5’s response was that foster parents discussed the challenges they face, and sought counsel from one another. Participant 6 responded they (social workers) communicate, explaining that they “report{ed} issues” that they faced, and believed needed attention.

Fear of Reprisal or Legal Consequences

The question about fear of reprisal or legal consequences was necessary to determine if fear of lawsuits hindered the implementation of PSTSFA. Based on the responses of the participants, the highest frequency of participants’ responses to the entire survey was fear of reprisal and legal consequences (*f*=12). Participants responded that they had fear of legal consequences when they provide services to foster youth; however, the intensity or level of the fear was greater for some than others. Each of the participants who had fear of reprisal or legal consequences explained why. Participant 5 explained that there is always fear of reprisal because sometimes the foster youth “threaten to call a lawyer.” Participant 6 responded that there was fear but explained the participant’s organization handled the legal consequences. Participant 8 responded that fear of reprisal or legal consequences “limit spontaneity” and that the “foster youth could become

defiant." Participant 9 and 10 responded there was fear of law suits, even when doing the right thing, explaining that they think before they provide service to foster youth.

Level of Accountability

Level of accountability was included among the survey questions to understand what the providers think with regard to their accountability to themselves, the foster youth, other providers, and the community. In responding to the question on what participants thought the level of accountability was within the foster care system, six of the participants thought the level was where it should be – accountable to the foster youth, and to the providers themselves. Although five of the participants explained that the level of accountability did not affect their ability to provide services to foster youth, the participants (*f*=6) acknowledged there was need for improvement in the level of accountability.

Participant 2 responded that the "level of accountability could improve among those in leadership." The participant also explained that the level of accountability had not affected level of service provided to foster youth. In responding to the question, Participant 3 had this to say;

> I feel that we as parents are there to protect the child. We go above and beyond to support but in turn, we don't have the support that we need from the companies that we work with. I think there is an unspoken effort to see the parents fail or to ensure that the social workers have a job if they find fault in every area, even when there is no fault to be found. I think people in authority look the other way to justify the funding.

Responding to how the level of accountability has affected how the participant provided services to the foster youth, Participant 3's response was, "we are the first level of protection for the child. We are there to ensure that they are safe and well take care of. I {participant} think with the limited resources and the constant stress that is inflicted by the programs that we work with, this can sometimes make it tough to stand tall and protect." Participant 8 responded that there was need to improve the level of accountability through training sections for would-be providers. Continuing, Participant 8 graded the level of accountability on a scale of 1 – 10, and assigned grade of 6 – 7. To quote Participant 8, "supervision of foster parents could be better."

Community Awareness and Societal Perceptions of the Foster Care System

The reason this question was included among the survey questions was for participants to express their thoughts about the impression or opinion of the community about the foster care providers and the foster care system. It was an opportunity for the providers to explain the impact of the community's perception on the providers' ability to serve the foster youth within the community on them as providers.

In responding to the question of community awareness, Participant 2 responded that "Foster care parents can be perceived as helpful and admiral for their work or concerning and untrustworthy, depending on the reports of youth involved. Community providers are generally limited within the foster care system and most decisions of the level of impact providers can offer come for the state." To Participant 2, the impression of the community depended on the foster youth that receives services. In responding to this question, Participant 3 had this to say.

> I think the foster care system is flawed. It is not providing healthy social workers who are empowered with the common sense to help the parents succeed. They are reading from text books and not able to really relate to any of the struggles that parents really encounter. Once they turn off their phones at 5pm, they are no longer available to assist, and this is an issue. A parent is a 24/7 role.

Continuing, Participant 3 explained that:

> People will not take kids in their homes yet down foster parents and set them up to fail. I think allot of this is stemming from the social workers, but it ultimately comes from the top. Directors that are power hungry and take advantage of parents are to blame. Employ people that can relate and have common sense when it comes to deal with human beings. Not text books.

To the question, Participant 5 responded that the community is not involved in the Participant 5's parenting but explained that "the public respect them. Agreed there have been problems, but the public knows it can be tough sometimes because few people provide services to many kids." Participant 6 seemed to explain what Participant 5 said about "there have been problems." Participant 6 responded that "… there have been problems...because of the recent incidences in Massachusetts, the perception of the people towards us {the providers}, but I feel the community is aware that we are doing our best. There is only so much we can do because our workload if heavy."

Participant 7 thought the community maintained "awareness of the needs of the foster care by collaborating with the social workers and sometimes, reporting issues that might adversely affect the children." Continuing, Participant 7 said "my clients, the

community, and the organizations do well together." Participant 8 thought because of lack of adequate communication, the community had limited awareness of the activities of the foster care providers. However, Participant 8 also said the general perception of the foster care system was inadequate because of "reported cases of neglect by foster parents in their wards, system not designed to catch such cases before they get reported." Participant 9 and 10 responded that the communities were very cooperative, especially they thought the foster youth and providers were special.

Summary

Chapter 4 explained data collection and analysis of the research. It also presented the results of the findings in the study. To collect data, open-ended survey were published in Survey Monkey, and participants clicked on the survey links that were made available to respond to the surveys. The participants were recruited by sending Letters of Invitation to organizations' Facebook administrators, sending e-mails to various organizations, visiting various offices that were affiliated with the Department of Children and Families, and by word of mouth. Seventeen participants responded to the survey, however 10 of the 17 participants responded to the consent question but did not respond to the other questions. As a result, 10 participants' responses were used for the data analysis. The questions were formulated using preexisting codes that formed the basis of the themes that were used to construct the questions. After data collection, NVivo 11 Pros software was used to perform data analysis. The formulated codes formed the basis and facilitated the data analysis. An interpretation and discussion of the analysis, and recommendation is included in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendation

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges faced by Massachusetts foster care providers in their implementation of the PSTSFA of 2014 through the theoretical lens of game theory. The study was guided by the research question: What are the perceived challenges that Massachusetts foster care providers face while implementing PSTSFA to foster youth between 13 and 17 years of age?

As replacement and amendments to existing policies, Congress enacted PSTSFA with the goal that its implementation would enhance the skills of the foster youth to enable them to adjust to independence after they transitioned from foster care. Previous research has focused on the youth and the challenges they faced after they transition from foster care (Pears et al., 2011). Researchers have discussed foster youth's inability to cope with independence, their homelessness, and other challenges that foster youth faced after they transitioned from care (Osgood et al., 2010; Pears et al., 2011). Other research has focused on enacting new policies (Ramseyer Winter et al., 2016), but no research has focused on the implementers of the policies, including social or case workers and managers, GAL, foster parents, and CASAs to determine the challenges they face in implementing the various policies.

The study was based on the following research question. What are the perceived challenges that Massachusetts foster care providers face while implementing PSTSFA to foster youth between 13 and 17 years of age? To understand the challenges that foster care providers face in the implementation of PSTSFA, game theory by von Neumann and Morgenstern (1944) was used as the theoretical lens to provide relationship between the

policy, the providers, and the implementation process. A phenomenological approach was used to explore and understand providers' experiences through their narrated experiences. Using the phenomenological inquiry provided the participants a deeper holistic opportunity to narrate their stories based on the meaning that they attributed to their concrete experiences (Creswell 2013; DeMarrgis & Lapan, 2004; Gergen, 2014; Loh, 2013; Paschen & Ison, 2014; Patton, 2015).

I collected the data that I used for this study using online open-ended survey questions. I recruited the participants by sending letters of participation and invitation to organizations' Facebook web administrators and sending e-mail to organizations who could not be contacted using Facebook. I also visited foster care offices and provided them with letters of invitation containing the survey link in SurveyMonkey. Individuals who heard about the survey by word of mouth contacted me by e-mail, and I responded by emailing the letter of invitation for them to respond. In total, I sent out 54 emails, made 72 phone calls, and sent letters of administration and invitation to 14 Facebook web administrators. Participants who volunteered clicked on the survey link on the SurveyMonkey and responded to the questions.

I obtained 17 responses from participants. Seven of the 17 participants responded to the consent request question but skipped the other survey questions. As a result, the seven responses were not used during the data analysis; only the responses of the 10 participants who responded beyond the consent question were used. A number of the key findings in this research was that apart from the themes on which the survey questions were based, new themes emerged based on the participants' responses. Foster care

providers face challenges with funding (*f* = 7), training (*f* = 4), communication and collaboration (*f* = 10), and fear of reprisal and legal ramification (*f* = 12). New themes that emerged from participants' responses included code of silence (*f* = 11), absence of foster parent's support (*f* = 7), fault finding (*f* = 7), heavy workload (*f* = 5), lack of empowerment (*f* = 5), and policy specific training (*f* = 6).

Interpretation of the Findings

In this study, game theory was used as theoretical framework that illuminated the choices made by the players in their decisions pertaining to the different factors that are required to achieve successful implementation of PSTSFA (McCain, 2009; PSTSFA, 2014; Zagare, 1984). Game theory is composed of cooperative and non-cooperative aspects (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). In the cooperative theory, members form a coalition, and the effect of the coalition is the development of positive values (Zagare, 1984). Developing the positive values require a paradigm shift among the team members including policy makers, the policy implementers, and those who are affected by the implementation—the foster youth who receive services (Zagare, 1984). For instance, the amount of understanding that Congress had regarding the needs of the foster youth influenced the provisions that they included in the policy during policy formulation (Curiel, 2013; PSTSFA, 2014). In the same vein, the amount of understanding that providers have regarding the needs of the youth and their understanding of the provisions of the policy determine the degree of success of the implementation.

During the formulation of PSTSFA, Congress intended to build a winning coalition with high-point values that will be shared by the players within the coalition

(McCain, 2009; Zagare, 1984). A feature of the members of a winning coalition is the members' control over one another within the team and their control of the team's decisions and plays (or moves in the game) because their unifying objective is to attain the same goal. Working together, they are able to implement enacted policies because all the players are trained to fundamentally secure advantage for one another (Curiel, 2013; Zagare, 1984). In the foster care system, providers are trained to secure advantage for the foster youth for who they provided services (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007).

In my data analysis, some of the participants' responses left the impression that providers were working adversely to the stipulation of game theory. For instance, apart from the fact that participants responded that more training was required ($f = 4$), one of the themes that emerged from the responses was that the training others received was not PSTSFA specific ($f = 4$). Contrary to the game theory, instead of working as a team, the implementers of PSTSFA appeared to be working against one another. I was not sure if the providers are looking for a scapegoat, because it appeared that providers felt other providers were looking for faults, even when none existed. It appeared as if the providers are playing against one another, there was no oneness, and the division was very obvious. Apart from the fact that the providers appeared overworked, a certain code of silence seemed to pervade the system. I explained a number of the themes that emerged during the data analysis.

Policy Specific Training

The provisions of PSTSFA included protecting children and youth at risk of sex trafficking, establishing reasonable and prudent parenting standards, and case plan and

transition planning for successful adulthood for foster youth. Achieving these goals and preparing youth for successful transition into adulthood required adequate training of the implementers of the law (PSTSFA, 2014). In the game theory, a player who finds useful information that is not available to the team, but will lead to the team's success, share such information (Zagare, 1984). If this logic is applied to the foster care system, the leadership of the foster care system have information that is crucial to the success of the foster youth – PSTSFA. However, this has not been disseminated to the entire "team" involved with providing services to the foster youth. Although some training has been provided to some providers, responses of participants suggest that such training has been inadequate and has not sufficiently addressed the provisions of and requirements of PSTSFA.

An identified omission in the curriculum of such trainings was the lack of training on sex trafficking. This information is part of the provision of PSTSFA and is available to the leadership of the foster care leadership team, but the information has not been made available to the rest of the team members. It appeared that the players who have useful information about PSTSFA are not sharing the information with other participants or team members (PSTSFA, 2014; Zagare, 1984). Seven of the participants in the survey indicated that they had received training (f=7), but the training was not PSTSFA specific. For instance, Participant 3 explained, "I am not sure if I would say it {the training} helped me to implement PSTSFA. Most of the trainings did not really focus on this aspect of parenting. We are told to go to counselling for the child, but the parent is never really taught how to deal with this kind of issues." In responding to a question regarding

fear of reprisal and legal consequences, Participant 3's response was "we have not had any training on sex trafficking issues." This has led me to wonder that if the title of the law enacted by Congress includes the phrase "preventing sex trafficking ..." it is incongruous that the providers who implement the policy have not received sex trafficking training, yet they are expected to adequately implement the law.

Shortage of Social/Case Workers and Foster Parents

One recurring theme that emerged from the participants' responses was the need for the foster care system to reduce workload (f=5) by employing more social workers and foster parents. In game theory, a team that is satisfied with minimal winning will have no incentive to increase its members because the least membership may just be sufficient to achieve minimal requirement (Zagare, 1984). However, if the goal of a team is to achieve greater value using more team members, it will be more advantageous to hire enough personnel who share the values of the system. The reason is because a large enough workforce will make it easy to purge the system of those members who do not share the same value structure (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944; Zagare, 1984). The foster care system appears to have fewer members serving a significantly large number of foster youth. Therefore, the system cannot afford to terminate members who do not share the goals that will enable the system to succeed or who are not serving in the interest of the team; instead it continues to try to achieve a winning goal with minimum team membership (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944; Zagare, 1984).

In their responses, participants said the number of foster youth who need services outnumber the social workers and foster parents by a high margin, and the social workers

were overworked. Participant 2 explained that overloading and overworking the social workers has led to "errors in judgement." In responding to the question about improvement in implementation of PSTSFA, Participant 2 recommended "improvement in funding, staff salaries." Participant 3 responded to the level of accountability by saying, "…I think with the limited resources and the constant stress that is inflicted by the programs that we work with, this can sometimes make it tough to stand tall and protect." Participant 4 also responded that "the providers take on much load" while Participant 5 responded to the question about the public's perception of the foster care providers by saying, "…the public knows it is can be tough sometimes because few people provide services to many kids." In responding to the same question of public perception, Participant 6 explained that "the community is aware that we {foster care providers} are doing our best. There is only so much we can do because the workload is heavy." Participant 7 responding to the challenges that foster care providers face explained that there are "issues regarding large caseloads. Social workers are always overwhelmed with so much work." Participant 7 also recommended training and employing more social workers in order to reduce the challenges that foster care providers face.

Communication

A theme that emerged in the participants' responses to communication and collaboration was the pervasiveness of code of silence (*f*=11). In the game theory's Prisoner's Dilemma (Refer to Chapter 2), the two suspects could not achieve a binding agreement because they could not communicate with one another (Hill & Varone, 2014; McMillan, 2013). If the prison guards allowed communication between the two prisoners,

it is likely that the prisoners' dilemma would not exist. If the prisoners were allowed to communicate, they would have negotiated, collaborated, and arrived at a consensus on what choices and options to accept (Zagare, 1984). Enforcement of the no-communication or code of silence changes the structure of team players' preferences and changes the expected outcome or the results of the game (Zagare, 1984). The responses of the participants appeared to reveal that the leadership within the foster care system have enforced a no-communication of the truth rule, and disobedience resulted in negative ramifications.

Game theory recognizes that the method of governance in an interconnected multifactor society involves the process of cooperation, and when the actors face restraints, they make collaborative choices based on professional judgements, and an understanding of the expected outcome (Hermans et al., 2014; Madani, 2013). As a strategy to develop economic behavior and achieve success in the face of unfavorable circumstances, fear and other hindrances are eliminated, and the team build trust among members (Myerson, 2013). This does not mean providers who work in opposition to the PSTSFA or commit crimes will not be subject to disciplinary measures, but that the providers are able to communicate with the leadership without fear of negative ramification (PSTSFA, 2014).

Code of Silence

Code of silence occurs when vital and important information is voluntarily or involuntarily withheld from those who have the authority to effect change, because of threat of force, danger of oneself, threat from a second party or out of fear of being

branded an outcast within the organization (Harlos, 2016). Withholding of genuine expression about issues in an organization from persons or authority who are capable of making changes or amends could positively or negatively impact an organization (Harlos, 2016; Wang & Hsieh, 2013).

Code of silence is in two dimensions, the quiescent or dormant silence, which could be fear or anger-based (Harlos, 2016; Wang & Hsieh, 2013). In this situation, speaking the truth could be frowned upon by the leadership in the organization, and the employee's response to the fear or anger is to stay silent.

The second dimension is the acquiescent or submissive, which is futility and resignation based (Harlos, 2016; Wang & Hsieh, 2013). In the case of acquiescent, an employee's silence could be subjective and personal and could be influenced by the culture of organizations or the lack of action from those who may be able to act on the information (Morrison, See & Pan, 2015; Wang & Hsieh, 2013). In either of the cases, the silence stifles objectivity and puts consumers at risk (Harlos, 2016).

From the responses of the participants, there is an effort by the leadership to stifle information flow. A good game is characterized by perfect information when the players are able to determine and understand their respective locations and have the information necessary to make appropriate moves (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944; Zagare, 1984). At that point, not only do the players have the information they need, they also possess the information sets that will enable them to relate to one another about their choices (Zagare, 1984). In this study, based on the responses of the participants, not only do participants not have the "perfect information," they do not have the authority to

request such information or report the information that they possess (Zagare, 1984). Contrary to expectations, one of the participants said the providers were "impacted in a negative way for being honest with the authority figures within the program,"

This appeared to be a concerted effort to suppress information. It appeared that authority requires silence from the providers and any attempt not to conform to the code of silence is frowned upon. After I read some of the responses regarding communication and the unspoken rule on code of silence, I could not help but think whether the code of silence had anything to do with the 2017 foster care audit report (mass.gov/auditor, 2017). In the report, auditors analyzed the medical information of a sample of 566 children under DCF care. The results of the audit revealed that based on the description of the medical treatments provided, there were 617 occurrences of what appeared to involve serious body injury to a child. DCF has no record of 260 ever reported or of any follow up to determine the nature of the incidences or whether they warranted investigation. Specific examples of such injuries that were cited on the audit report as not recorded included a 15-year-old who had brain damage from a firearm injury, a one year old who sustained second-degree burns on body parts, and a 12-year-old who sustained multiple head contusions, which the physician determined were a result of an assault (mass.gov/auditor, 2017).

From the participants' responses, players (providers) in this game appear to be in a zero game where players are unable to benefit through communication, because the interest of the players are adversarial to themselves (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944; Zagare, 1984). When Congress formulated PSTSFA, its intention was for players to

participate in a nonzero game, where communication and collaboration benefit the players (PSTSFA, 2014; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944; Zagare, 1984). The recent Massachusetts Audit Report of the foster care system was based on data that was obtained between 2014 and 2015. These data appeared to have elucidated the point. The report pointed out that the Department of Children and Family (DCF) did not report incidents of abuse, neglect, and/or sexual abuse of children in its care to district attorneys for investigation (Mass.gov/auditor, 2017). Although the report was based on data that was 2 to 3 years old, it appears the system has not changed. The reason is because like one participant recommended, "There needs to be a conversation; that is where it all begins. One that is open and honest, without consequences. I think no one is really talking about this issue...I think people hope it will just go away. But it will not."

When there is code of silence, or when providers fail to communicate, those who are negatively impacted are the children and youth because they are the recipients of the services. For instance, if the foster parents or other providers, out of fear of negative ramifications decide to be silent and not report incidence, the foster youth and children are denied the services and treatments that they deserve (mass.gov/auditor, 2017). The code of silence within the system appeared to be so pervasive that incidences like abuse of children were not reported. Like the participants' response showed, the silence is not only on the part of the providers, it also appeared to occur among leadership. For instance, there were instances of abuse that DCF knew about that it did not report to the District Attorney's office to investigate (mass.gov/auditors, 2017).

The sample that was used in this study was small, however, the responses appeared to have validated the results of the audit report. One participant, a social or case worker responded that providers report issues they believed needed attention. This response raised the question about the flow of information, because it appeared communication occurred only when there were issues that one party deemed reportable. Applying the game theory, this type of interaction is not communicative and collaborative, can stunt the growth of a team and hinder the progress (Zagare, 1984).

In game theory, to attain optimal utility and maximum profit, the parties are supposed to become interdependent on one another and work together to develop, formulate or implement the rules that apply in the game (McCain, 2010). If nonzero game rules are applied, the players communicate, collaborate, and ensure commitment to the set goals. In that case, much of the challenges that providers face would be eliminated, the goals of PSTSFA would be achieved, and the foster youth would transition from foster care with the skills to help them cope with adulthood.

Fault Finding

Game theory stresses interactive decision making by actors, with focus on the set goals or objectives to be met, the benefit that is advanced, and the economic benefit of utilizing the theory (McCain, 2010; Zhao et al., 2010). As players work together to achieve their common goals, they become accountable to one another as team members, which in this case includes foster youth, foster care providers, and Congress (McCain, 2010; PSTSFA, 2017). In game theory, rules specify the expected outcome for each player who work together for the betterment of all the players (McCain, 2010; von

Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). The interactive decision-making process among the providers was that of finding faults with other providers. The system appeared to be looking for scapegoats – providers to hold responsible for the mishaps within the system. Fault finding mentality erodes trust and leads to suspicion which was obvious from the responses that were provided by the participants.

Cooperating teams illuminate the choices of the players and maximize outcome for the team members. Members of such teams are not self-centered with one player working to gain the upper hand over the other players (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944; Zagare, 1984). In this team that was comprised of foster care providers, it appeared team members are not only competing with one another through fault finding (f=7), but they are ready to bring down one another to in order appear successful. Based on participants' responses, it appeared the social or case workers and foster parents operate as separate competing entities, although their interests are the children and foster youth. The foster parents believed the case workers were "encouraged to find faults with parents" instead of working to support one another. As one foster parent explained, "there is an unspoken effort to see parents fail or to ensure the social workers have a job if they find fault in every area." Regarding the question of communication and collaboration, a number of the case workers responded that communication was limited, except with "assigned foster parents," but there was "limited communication with other foster care providers."

Other Challenges

Other challenges that foster care providers encountered included fear of law suits and funding. The majority of the participants reported that they had fear of lawsuits even when they were doing the right thing. In the game theory, the team is expected to choose optimal strategy that maximized the security level of its members (Zagare, 1984). The type of optimal strategy that is applied is the dominant and not the dominated strategy (Zagare, 1984). In this team called the foster care system, the dominated strategy appeared be in control. Apart from one participant who responded that the organization the participant works for takes charge of lawsuits, all other participants appeared to work under fear of lawsuits.

When Congress enacted PSTSFA, the expectation was that providers will work together to ensure the successful implementation of the policy. Congress did not expect agents or implementers to unilaterally implement the policy without the interaction and cooperation of other implementers that the policy affects, such as the foster youth, foster parents, social or case workers, CASA, GAL, and other parties (Dunn, 2015; Fiestras-Janeiro et al., 2011; John, 2013; Myerson, 2013). However, the responses of the providers suggest the need for more effort by providers to work together for the interest of the foster youth.

Limitations of the study

The data collection method that was utilized in this study was online open-ended survey questions, and the responses I received were limited to the information that the responders provided. There was no opportunity to ask follow-up and additional questions.

For instance, when the providers' responses needed additional details, the responses were not tailored towards the question, or the responses were off point. In such instances, because the participants responded to the survey online, it was not possible to clarify the participants' responses or ask further questions that were generated from participants' responses. When the survey question asked participants in what ways they communicated and collaborated with other participants, two participants responded "by phone" and "email." It appeared the question needed explanation or was not specific enough, but because the survey was online, I did not have the opportunity to reformulate the questions.

It seemed that in instances, further clarifications were required from participants; for instance, when asked what training participants received, two participants responded "limited" or "minimal." If data collection was a face to face interview, I would have asked for clarification about the limited or minimal nature of the training. However, because data collection was online response, that opportunity did not exist. Participant 3 responded that the times when trainings were scheduled were not convenient for working parents, and that the environment was not healthy, noting "dishonest and racial obstacles." If this was a live interview, clarification would be prompted to understand to what specifically the participant was referring. It would have been important to clarify the kind of training that participants received in order to determine if the training had any connection with PSTSFA. Two of the participants admitted they did not know about PSTSFA, collaboration with CASA or other foster care providers. One responded they (foster parents) were not trained on sex trafficking; an explanation of exactly the kind of

training the providers received would be important in determining if the training was related to PSTSFA.

Another limitation to this study was that there was no way for me to know if foster care provider organizations who were asked to forward the letter of invitation to providers actually did that. In addition, some foster care providers did not want their comments documented. Finally, some organizations seemed uncertain as to who had the authority to provide the information to their membership, thereby losing the invitation in their email system or giving me the run-around. This was frustrating for me, but I considered it part of the research process.

If the data collection method was face to face interview, I would have followed up with two participants whose required further clarification. Participant 1's response to the question on training was "limited," for funding "funding is limited," for communication "not much communication," for fear of reprisal "yes," and for level of accountability "none." After the short negative responses to the first sets of questions, the participant skipped the rest of the questions. Because it was an online survey, I could not ask further questions, and I could not see the participant's body movements or facial movements to determine whether the participants was unhappy, frustrated, or angry, and if that is the situation, with whom and for what reason.

A second participant, Participant 3 expressed frustration about the case workers, explaining that "case workers were encouraged to find faults with parents, even when there is nothing to find." To the participant, social workers "are reading from text books and not able to relate to any of the struggles that parents really encounter." The

participant also stated that “foster parents don’t have the support that we {foster parents} need from the companies that we work with,” She stated that “there is an unspoken effort to see parents fail, or to ensure that social workers have a job.” In the recommendation, the participant stated that “there needs to be a conversation that is where it all begins. One that is honest without consequences…no one is really talking about this issue, so it is kept silent. If it is not talked about, I think people hope it will just go away. But it will not.” Participant 3’s responses reveal deep-seated frustration within the system, frustrations which are not being addressed and raise questions. If this survey was face to face interview, I would have been able to ask follow-up questions.

Participant 3’s response to communication was “sometimes we are impacted in a negative way for being honest with authority figures within the program.” This response from Participant 3 seemed to correspond with the Massachusetts 2017 Audit Report of from January 1, 2014 and December 31, 2015. The audit report identified incidence that “included physical assaults, injuries that resulted from the use of weapons, drug overdoses or poisonings, suicide attempts, fire-related injuries, and severe burns or bone fractures” (Mass.gov, 2017). According to the 2017 Massachusetts Foster Care Audit Report, the medical information of 566 children that the auditors obtained, there were “617 occurrences that appeared to involve serious bodily injury to a child, based on the description of the medical treatment provided.” The audit found that in “260 of these occurrences, DCF had no record of their {the abuses} ever being reported to the department or of DCF identifying them as incidents that should be followed up to determine whether they were critical incidents that should have been reported

and possibly investigated" (Mass.gov, 2017). Could it be that the incidences were concealed because providers "were negatively impacted" if they spoke the truth? Because this was not a face to face interview, it is difficult to ascertain if the participant would have been willing to share additional information.

Table 4 contains an illustration of the strengths of the qualitative phenomenological approach that was used as the methodology in this study. The methodological approach gave the participants' an opportunity to narrate their experiences about the challenges they face as they provide services to foster youth. This study also raised awareness and provided me with a better understanding of the challenges that foster care providers face. The weaknesses in the study included the inability to ask follow-up questions or to observe the participants' facial cues and other body expressions because the questions were in an online open-ended survey (Bull et al., 2016).

There is opportunity for future research that will address the challenges that foster care providers face in their implementation of PSTSFA, including, funding, training, and code of silence within the system. Other challenges include, fault finding by leadership, shortage of personnel, fear of reprisal and legal consequences, and the lack of accountability (Bull et al., 2016). In addressing the themes, researchers could use face to face interviews for data collection. The threat in this research includes resistance to change. There is the threat that future research might not change the status quo within the foster care system. In that case, there will be resistance to change the by the foster care leadership.

Table 4.

SWOT Analysis of the Limitation of the Study

Internal	External
Use of qualitative phenomenological approach Opportunity for providers to tell their stories Raising awareness about the challenges that foster care providers encounter while providing services to foster youth	The survey methodology - use of online open-ended survey questions Inability to ask follow-up questions in instances that the researcher thought necessary Inability to see participant facial expression and body language
Strengths	Opportunities
Weaknesses	Threats
Future research using face to face interview for data collection Research that focuses on how the foster care system can address the themes raised	Resistance to change, because of embodies status quo inability to make a difference within the foster care system

Recommendations for Future Research

Prior to utilizing the online survey to publish my open-ended questions for data collection, I attempted to use the face to face interview method. I sent several emails, made numerous phone calls, and visited various foster care offices. Many of the providers I contacted appeared interested in the topic and were very interested in partnering with me. However, that interest quickly changed to resistance, and the organizations withdrew their willingness to partner with me when I requested signed letters of cooperation. One organization agreed to partner with me only on the grounds that I allow the organization to participate in a joint research project with me. When I explained that the study was a dissertation, and I could not participate in a joint

partnership, the organization rescinded their interest in the study. I recommend similar research that could be in joint collaboration with an organization using the interview method.

I also recommend a quantitative research that determines if there is a statistical correlation between the themes including training, funding, communication and collaboration, code of silence, policy specific training, shortage of personnel, fault finding, fear of reprisal and legal consequences, lack of support from leadership, and level of accountability. If the researcher can focus in-depth on single or multiple topics at a specific time, the participants can respond to questions on fewer themes at a time. For example, taking on communication and collaboration might shed more light on why providers believe leadership has focused on finding faults with their services, instead of working together for the betterment of the system.

One of the participants responded that they have not received "training on sex trafficking issues"; therefore, training should be studied as a topic by itself. If the 2017 audit identified 118 incidences of sex abuse (Mass.gov, 2017), it means more training should be offered to all of the foster care providers about sex abuse and sex trafficking and ways to identify instances of sex trafficking.

In my initial contact with CASA, I was informed by one of the leaders that CASA does not utilize PSTSFA and therefore, could not participate in interview sections about PSTSFA. After I changed the method to an online open-ended survey, I contacted the CASA administrator with the letter of invitation containing the link but was told to send the link in an email. CASA did not respond to the online survey; however, during my

research I identified other states' CASA, including Ohio, New York, New Hampshire, and California that use PSTSFA. I recommend research to determine whether the entire states' CASA affiliates are supposed to be utilizing PSTSFA, and for those not using the policy, to determine the reason why the affiliates are not utilizing the policy.

Implications for Social Change

Several issues were raised in this research, Congress has enacted a policy (PSTSFA) that is expected to change the lives of children, youth, and families. However, those changes can only occur if the providers are trained to utilize the policy, if funds are available to implement the policy, if there is communication and collaboration among the players, and if the foster care system has sufficient personnel to make changes. Results of the study will contribute to the existing information about the challenges that foster care providers face, and provide a platform by which state government, DCF, and other providers will formulate corrective measures by empowering providers to speak up and report issues that affect or might enhance the welfare of the youth under their care.

The insight and knowledge gained from the study will be useful in formulating corrective measures of identifying and addressing the challenges that foster care providers face to reduce or eliminate incidences of abuse. When December 2017 Audit Report was released, the state governor refuted the claims because the data that was used for the study was collected between 2014 and 2015. However, responses to my online open-ended survey in 2017 corresponded with a number of the results that were contained in the audit (mass.gov, 2017). My hope is that the results of this study will be used as a form of affirmation that although the data the audit used was from 2014 and

2015, the results may not be different from current situation, especially in the formulating procedures that address PSTSFA.

One of the missing links within the foster care system and as identified in this study and the audit report was what appeared to be a code of silence that providers observed. The hope is that utilizing the game theory, the results of this study might be useful in formulating comprehensive programs that will help the state identify and remove providers and organizations that do not represent the interests of the children and youth, as well as the entire foster care system.

Reflection on Researchers Experience

Prior to choosing this topic, I did not have much knowledge or experience about the foster care system. One day, I met an 18-year-old young man on the street looking for money to buy lunch. Not sure why he was on the street instead of in school on a school day, I proceeded to ask him a few questions; I asked why he was not in school, and why he was begging for money for food. Through the young man's responses, I got my first glimpse and insight into the foster care system. The young man told me he "aged out" of foster care and that his "mama" kicked him out. I could not connect both responses, and decided to seek additional information from co-workers and to conduct some research on my own. The responses from co-workers and the results of my research led to the research of this topic. The purpose was to learn more and to see what I can contribute to ensuring that foster youth who transition out of foster care acquire the skills they need to cope with independence. I realized that the more I researched and talked to individuals including biological parents, law enforcement, lawyers, social or case workers, and even

foster parents, the more feedback I received about the foster care system in Massachusetts.

During the data collection phase, I was not sure what to expect from the participant's responses because of my pre-knowledge of the topic. In order to reduce researcher's bias, I applied the process of epoche and bracketing. Epoche and bracketing are used in phenomenological research to reduce researcher bias and assumptions and allow the participants' voices of subjectivity to emerge (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). I needed to separate my knowledge of the foster care system and focus on what the participants meant in their responses and personal accounts, because understanding the challenges was a phenomenon based on the participants' experiences and points of view (Chan et al. 2013). As I applied epoche and bracketing during the data analysis, I was able to set aside all biases concerning the questions, focus on the participants' words and meaning, and see the responses from the participants' perspective.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on my research, I was able to understand that foster care providers face various challenges during their implementation of PSTSFA and gain in depth knowledge and understanding of the challenges. The participant's responses to the various survey questions that were presented under seven themes, including training, funding, communication and collaboration, fear of reprisal or legal consequences, level of accountability and community awareness and societal perceptions of the foster care system, contributed to a deeper understanding of the challenges providers face. New themes that I was not expecting emerged from the participants responses. It is hoped that

the results of this study will contribute to existing information about the challenges foster care providers face and provide a platform on which states and local government will work together to address the issues that were raised in the study. In addition to that, the hope is that because of this study, foster care states will formulate comprehensive programs that will help to identify and remove providers that do not represent the interest of the foster care children, youth, and the entire foster care system.

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Appendix A: Literature Review Search Log

Database	Search Terms	Number of Hits	Notes or comments
Google Scholar	Game theory	508,000 hits	Restricted search to date range 2012 to 2016
Google Scholar	Game theory in public policy	176,000 hits	Restricted search to date range 2012 to 2016
Thoreau	Game theory	39,306 hits	Restricted search to date range 2010 to 2016, and peer reviewed journals only.
Thoreau	Game theory in public policy	7 hits	Restricted search to date range 2010 to 2016, and peer reviewed journals only. One of the journals (added to the number of hits) was published in Portuguese.
Google Scholar	Logic Model	697,000 hits	Search restricted to 2012 to 2016.
Google Scholar	Evaluating public policy with logic model	17,400.00 hits	Search restricted to 2012 to 2016.
Thoreau	Logic Model	10,064	Restricted search to peer review, and date range from 2010 to 2016.
Thoreau	Evaluating with logic model	87 hits	Restricted search to peer review, and date range from 2010 to 2016.
Google Scholar	Phenomenological Research	90,500	Restricted search to a date range of 2012 to 2017.
Thoreau	Phenomenological Research	5,964	Restricted search criteria of 2012 to 2017

Appendix B: Databases and Key Terms

Database	Key Terms
Academic Search Complete	Abuse and foster children Aged out and foster youth Qualitative research Phenomenological research Aged out and the foster care system Foster care system and challenges Game theory and policy formulation Job training and foster youth Public policy and foster care system
Education Research Complete	Education and the foster care system Foster care system Public Policy and the foster care system
Emerald Management/ Emerald Insight	Aging out of foster care American youth and foster care system Challenges of aged out foster youth Education in foster care Foster care children and youth Foster youth and independence
ERIC	Aging out of foster care and independent living Behavioral outcomes for foster children and youth Dropout and foster youth Education and Foster Care system Game theory and public policy Homelessness and foster youth Improving educational outcome for foster children and youth Professional and occupational competence Youth and occupational identity Youth and career identity Foster children and career management Youth transitioning and foster care
ERIC and Education Research Complete Simultaneous Search	Educating children and youth in foster care Educational outcomes in foster children and youth Foster care and youth transition Homelessness among youth Occupational identity amount foster children Teenage pregnancies and foster youth

	Transition to adulthood Youth emancipation
Google Scholar	Aged out youth and homeless shelters Education and the foster care system Foster care and homeless shelters Game theory Qualitative research Phenomenological research Game theory and public policy Homelessness and foster children Homelessness and foster youth Mentors and foster youth
ProQuest Central	Normalcy Educational outcome and foster youth Foster care system Foster youth and educational outcomes Foster youth and job placements Game theory Qualitative research Phenomenological research Home after emancipation Mentors in the foster care system Occupational identity Restoring dignity to foster children and youth Self-perception and foster children Self-perception of the foster youth
ProQuest Nursing and Allied Health Source	Ending homelessness among aged foster youth Foster care system Psychological outcome among aged out foster youth The future of foster teen and youth Trauma among foster alumni
ProQuest Science Journals	Children and self esteem Foster children and mental health Foster youth and mental health Maltreatment and foster youth Occupational identity and youth Stigmatization of foster children and youth
Psychology Databases Simultaneous Search	Emotional vulnerability versus aging out Foster placement of children and youth Psychiatry and foster alumni
Sage Premier	Aging out and foster care College education and foster youth Congress and stealing the right of foster children

	Educational policy and foster youth Foster care and game theory Foster children and right to education Foster youth and independent living Foster youth and poverty Giving back rights and foster children and youth Homelessness among foster youth Human right and foster care Right to succeed and foster care system Success amount foster youth Qualitative research Phenomenological research Supporting youth transitioning from foster care Youth adoption versus aging out Youth transitioning
ScienceDirect	Foster care system and educating the youth Foster youth and crimes Foster youth and homeless shelters Pregnancy rate and foster youth Pre-reading and writing skills among foster children Transitioning to adulthood, challenges of the youth
Thoreau Multi-Database Search	Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act

Appendix C: Open Ended Survey Questions

Instructions:

The purpose of this survey, is to better understand if there are challenges that foster care providers including parents and case workers encounter in their implementation of *Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (PSTSFA*) that Congress enacted in 2014. For the purpose of this study, foster care providers refer to foster care parents, and case managers.

In order to better understand what challenges foster care providers encounter, it is important to answer each question in detail, and to the best of your knowledge.

You must be 18 years or older to respond to the survey questions.

Demographic Questions

1. Age range of the participant
   - Less than 18 years old
   - 18 years or older
2. How many foster youth between the ages of 13 and 17 years old have you provided service to since 2014?
   - 1 – 4
   - 5 – 10
   - 11 – 15
   - 16 and over
3. How long have you worked or volunteered in the field of foster care?
   - Less than 1 year
   - 2 – 5 years
   - 6 – 10 years
   - 11 years and over
4. What role in the provision of foster care do you provide?
   - Foster parent
   - Social Worker
   - Guardians ad Litem (GAL)
   - Court appointed special advocates (CASA)

Survey Questions

1. Training:

   What training did you receive as a foster care provider?

   How did it impact your ability to implement PSTSFA?

2. Funding:

   How does the availability of funds to foster care providers in Massachusetts impact your ability to provide the programs and services that are specified in PSTSFA.

3. Communication & Collaboration:

   Explain how you communicate with other foster care providers including the policy makers, and your local community.

   In what ways do you collaborate or work together with other foster care providers in your area? These other providers can be at the local, state, or national level and might include CASA or the GAL.

4. Fear of reprisal or legal consequences:

   In what way has the fear of reprisal or legal consequences impacted the level of service you have provided for youth as specified in PSTSFA.

5. Level of Accountability:

   What do you feel is the level of accountability within the foster care system?

   How has the level of accountability affected your how you provide to foster youth as expected by PSTSFA?

6. Community awareness and societal perceptions of the foster care system:

   How does your community maintain awareness of the needs of foster care providers and how does it impact your ability to serve your role as a foster care provider?

   How do you feel is the publics' general perception is of foster care providers? Explain why you think that way.

7. Challenges:

   Do you believe foster care providers face challenges in the implementation of PSTSFA?

8. Improvement in implementation:

   Do you believe improvement is required to achieve success in the implementation of PSTSFA?

   Could you suggest what the improvements are?