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**Put Him in Grandma's House:
Investigating Variation in Kinship Care Policy and Procedure across Ohio's
County-based Child Welfare System**

By: Andreja Siliunas

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of Independent Study Thesis

Senior Thesis

Supervised by: Dr. Anne Nurse

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

2013-2014

*This thesis is dedicated to the grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles,
neighbors, teachers, social workers, and all other people
who ensure that children have a place to call home...*

*...and especially to Dawn, who embodies the spirit of kinship
and has made me want to embody it too.*

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You are my backbone, my muses, my kin. Thank you for your enduring support.

Abstract

Since 1980, the U.S. child welfare system has exhibited an increasing reliance upon kinship caregivers as a resource for children who have been removed from the homes of their birthparents due to allegations of abuse or neglect. Literature suggests that agencies differ considerably in their treatment of kinship care providers; however, limited research has been conducted examining the causes and implications of this variation, especially in the case of Ohio's county-based system. The current study thus aims to define the distinguishing characteristics of kinship policies and procedures of child welfare agencies across Ohio, and to consider the impact of various factors upon agencies' involvement with kinship caregivers. A kinship policy survey was designed in collaboration with local agency staff and the director of PCSAO, a large membership of Ohio public children services agencies, and then distributed to Ohio's 88 county agencies. One hundred and forty-three respondents from 45 (51%) counties participated, and seven interviews supplement the quantitative data. Local kinship policies and procedures were found to be significantly impacted by the designation of a kinship worker, preferences for particular legal and licensure statuses for kin, various county-level demographic characteristics, and restrictions in agencies' funding streams.

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Introduction

There's a knock on the door. An eight-year-old child looks up from his lunch to find a strange woman standing in the doorway. She takes him by the arm and tells him to come with her, please; he can't stay at his mother's house anymore. The child frantically glances back at his dog. He looks back at his teddy bear and his blanket, at his unfinished mac-and-cheese still sitting on the kitchen table. As they pull out of the driveway, he sees his best friend down the street. Where is he going? What will happen to his blanket, his bike, his family, his friends? Where's mom? Yeah, she's abusive. Yeah, she's an alcoholic. Where is she? Suddenly, he finds himself in a strange house, in a strange place. Surrounded by strangers.

After nineteen years in the child welfare field, an agency administrator recalls a video that he watched in his early social work days. Describing this particular scene, he expresses a feeling of discomfort and empathy. "It stuck with me," he exclaims, and then adds, "We're traumatizing the child by removing. Sometimes we can't help it; we have to remove. The child's not safe. But what are we doing to minimize the trauma?" Reflecting a recent philosophical shift in child welfare, he proposes, "The kid is in grandma's house all the time, so put him in grandma's house."

Within the past few decades, the U.S. child welfare system has increasingly turned to kinship caregivers as an alternative to traditional foster care when children must be removed from their homes due to allegations of abuse or neglect. In its broadest sense, kinship care has been defined as "any living arrangement in which children do not live with either of their parents and are instead cared for by a relative or someone with whom they have had a prior relationship" (Geen, 2004, p. 132). For centuries, relatives have been taking in their kin without state involvement (Hegar & Scannapieco, 2005, p. 518). Recently, however, the child welfare system

has formalized these arrangements, resulting in a practice called formal kinship care (Geen, 2003a, p. 3).

So, how do these relatives and friends end up in caregiving roles? It happens “as sudden as ‘Boom!’” one caregiver explains (O’Brien, Massat, & Gleeson, 2001, p. 728). A majority of “caregivers become involved in the care of their minor grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and cousins without advance notice due to unexpected death, incarceration, drug use, neglect, and physical or mental illness” (O’Brien et al., 2001, p. 728). Some caregivers assume this new responsibility voluntarily, while others are approached by child welfare agencies seeking placements for children who must be removed from their homes. The resulting arrangements can take a variety of forms, including kinship foster care, in which case children live with relatives but are in the custody of the state, and voluntary kinship care, which occurs outside of state custody (Geen, 2003a, p. 3).

Research overwhelmingly suggests that kinship foster parents confront significant challenges that most non-kin foster parents do not (Geen, 2004). According to a literature review conducted by Robert Geen, children in kinship foster care are generally younger and more likely to be African American than those living with stranger foster parents. Their birth parents are more likely to struggle with drugs or alcohol, to be young, and to never have married than the biological parents of children in non-kin arrangements. Kinship foster parents, on the other hand, tend to be older, poorer, less educated, single, and more likely to take on large sibling groups than non-kin caregivers. They are often the grandparents of children in their care, and various studies have indicated that they are more likely than non-kin foster parents to report poor

health. Furthermore, Okagbue-Reaves finds that “grandparents, in general, are being compromised by the caregiving experience,” which impacts their perceived quality of life, physical health, emotional health, and levels of bodily pain (2005, pp. 63–64).

Nevertheless, these placements have been found to benefit children based on a number of outcome measures. The literature consistently finds that kinship care placements tend to be longer than non-kin arrangements and exhibit less frequent placement changes (Berrick, 1997, p. 274; Geen, 2004, p. 143). Even after age, ethnicity, health problems, number of placements, and length of time in care are accounted for, studies suggest that kinship care protects children from reentry into foster care (Berrick, 1997). The likelihood of disruption for kinship placements can vary, however, based on a number of factors, including caregiver relationships with birth parents, payment amounts, caregiver sense of duty and empathy, caregiver confidence in their ability to address a child’s needs, age and health of caregivers, accessibility of services and caregiver willingness to access them, and children’s difficulties adapting to kinship placements (Chang & Liles, 2007, pp. 511–512). Several studies suggest that unmet caregiver needs and high psychological distress levels directly affect child well-being (Denby & Bowmer, 2013; Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2011).

Research investigating the outcomes of kinship care is young, however, and due to limitations in quantity, validity, and generalizeability of findings, these studies are “unable to clearly identify what contributes to its success or failure” (Pabustan-Claar, 2007, p. 69). To a large degree, the literature fails to account for the fact that kinship placements are dynamic and heterogeneous, involving various placement pathways and subgroups of children with diverse

sociodemographic and maltreatment characteristics (Leslie, Landsverk, Horton, Ganger, & Newton, 2000, p. 318). Statistical tests primarily depend upon online reporting databases, which limit the scope and reliability of results and occasionally confine samples by including only cases involving children in agency custody, thus excluding voluntary arrangements (Koh & Testa, 2008; Leslie et al., 2000; Pabustan-Claar, 2007). While qualitative studies and policy evaluations are better able to account for diversity in caregiver experiences, they represent small subsets of kinship caregivers whose self-reports may not be representative of placement outcomes nationwide (Denby & Bowmer, 2013; Gleeson, O'Donnell, & Bonecutter, 1997; Gleeson, 1996; Hornby, Zeller, & Karraker, 1996; Murphy, 2008; O'Brien et al., 2001; Okagbue-Reaves, 2005; Thornton, 1991). The research models in large part neglect a number of variables, including internal agency characteristics and elements of their kinship care policies, as well as various aspects of the agencies' socio-economic, political, and historical contexts.

Kinship care has not only introduced a new placement option for children in out-of-home care, but it also sheds light upon "society's views of what constitutes safe and stable homes for foster children and whether or not kin should be compensated for this care" (Geen, 2004, p. 132). Across the nation, state and county agencies have developed unique policies and procedures that distinctly shape the experiences of modern kinship families. As a kinship intern in Wayne County, Ohio, I spent three years immersed at a public children services agency under the supervision of a kinship caseworker. Upon conversing with staff members and caregivers from other counties throughout the state, I was struck by the stark differences in levels of support and supervision assigned to kinship caregivers across Ohio's state-supervised, county-administered

child welfare system. The current study investigates these local kinship policies and begins to explore the causes and implications of inter-county kinship policy variation. Significant policy characteristics have not yet been linked to placement outcomes, providing a platform for further research. I begin with a review of literature, first summarizing the dynamic history of federal kinship legislation and then isolating specific kinship policy characteristics that vary across states and child welfare agencies. An overview of the research surrounding kinship care throughout Ohio ensues, followed by a theoretical framework for investigating kinship policy and, ultimately, the current study's methodology and results.

Review of Literature

Federal Kinship Care Policy

Throughout American history, family members and friends have traditionally made efforts to support one another in times of need, often taking on caregiving responsibilities when birth parents have been unable to do so. These informal arrangements originally occurred without expectations of government compensation, perhaps in response to an assumed sense of family obligation. In the late twentieth century, however, U.S. child welfare policy exhibited an ideological shift, accompanied by the emergence of formal kinship foster care and new forms of financial support for relative caregivers (Hegar and Scannapieco 520). With the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, the federal government acknowledged a child's right to maintain an ethnic and cultural identity, expressing a preference for family-like placements, and in 1979, the Supreme Court ruled that relatives meeting foster care licensing standards were eligible to receive the same federal foster care funds as nonkinship foster care providers (Johns, 2000, p. 153; Geen, 2004, p. 137).

Although legislative changes in the late twentieth century introduced kinship care as a valid placement option for children entering the child welfare system, very few kin were designated as foster parents for their related children prior to 1980. In 1980, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, which emphasized permanency planning, reunification, and adoption, explicitly required states to place children in the "least restrictive" and "most family-like" settings (Hegar & Scannapieco, 2005, p. 521; Johns, 2000, p. 153). Since then, reliance on

kinship foster care has dramatically grown, and today, relatives are often seen as a primary placement choice. An especially steep increase occurred in the late 1980s, as indicated by the findings of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which report that in 1986, 18% of children in state custody were placed with relatives, as compared to the 31% of children in care living with relatives in 1990 (Boots & Geen, 1999, p. 1; Johns, 2000, p. 134).

In 1994, when Social Security Act Amendments authorized waivers for innovative use of federal funds, several states developed programs to support kinship foster parents, and some created subsidized guardianship programs (Hegar & Scannapieco, 2005, p. 521). Since then, three pieces of legislation have had a particularly significant impact upon U.S. kinship care policy: the 1996 welfare reform act, the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act, and the 2008 Fostering Connections Act. The following sections address these three developments in federal kinship care legislation and briefly discuss their implications for state policy.

1996 Welfare Reform

Shelly Waters Boots and Rob Geen (1999) write that "it was the 1996 welfare reform act that officially encouraged states to give relatives first priority in providing care for foster children, solidified the role of kinship care as a federal policy issue, and provoked discussion among policymakers as to how welfare policy would affect kinship care" (1). This act, also known as The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), encouraged states to place children with relatives who meet state child protection standards (Hegar & Scannapieco, 2005, p. 521). In striving to end dependency upon welfare and increase states' flexibility in administering public welfare, the PRWORA has also had a significant

impact upon kinship caregivers by changing the way they receive public benefits on behalf of the children in their care (Mullen, 2000, p. 114).

One significant result of the 1996 welfare reform was the establishment of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to replace three existing programs: Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Emergency Assistance for Needy Families (EA), and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program (Mullen, 2000, p. 116). The primary difference between TANF and the previous system lies in their funding structures. Under AFDC, a state's funding depended upon its expenditures in the three programs. TANF, however, is a fixed block grant, and federal dollars are now allocated based on previous federal spending on the given state. States can use the funds for various services targeting low-income individuals; however, these block grants involve federal conditions including maintenance of time limits, work requirements, child support enforcement, reduction in welfare caseloads, and ending of entitlement, which are enforced by strict financial penalties (Mullen, 2000, pp. 116–117).

Anderson (2006), in examining the impact of TANF policy decisions upon kinship caregivers, discusses two main types of TANF grants: TANF family grants and TANF child-only grants. He surveyed staff at public assistance (TANF) agencies and child welfare agencies in twenty states, collecting data for 1996 and 1999, and found that TANF child-only payment rates were lower than kinship family payment rates and dramatically lower than licensed kinship foster payments (Anderson, 2006, pp. 725, 729). These TANF child-only grants are the least generous but most accessible option for relatives, as they exempt cases from time limits and

work and training requirements that relatives in voluntary or private kinship care must meet in order to secure the more appealing TANF family payments (Anderson, 2006, p. 727). Child-only grants exclude adults, and they only offer financial and medical assistance for the children whom they cover (Nelson, Gibson, & Bauer, 2010, pp. 5–6). Nelson et al discuss the implications of this model, writing that, “Social policies’ support for relatives as primary caregivers is, however, not backed up by financial support to cover the extra cost of caring for children, with the exception of the modest child-only welfare grant” (Nelson et al., 2010, p. 5).

PRWORA gives states considerable latitude in determining how to use the TANF block grant; therefore, as Anderson writes, “The impact of TANF on kinship care providers will be affected largely by state program and policy decisions, because TANF devolved the most important aspects of welfare decisionmaking to the states” (2006, p. 717). Notably, the definition of eligible kin as well as determination of payment rates has been left to the discretion of the states (720). Furthermore, some states have chosen to expand their services for kin or support legal guardianship programs using TANF funds (730).

1997 Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

In 1997, the federal government passed another piece of legislation that has had a significant impact upon U.S. kinship care policy at state and county levels. This act, called the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), emphasized child welfare’s goals of permanency, safety, and child and family well-being and expressed a clear preference for permanent placement with relatives (Hegar & Scannapieco, 2005, p. 521). Several of its provisions have had a direct impact upon kinship care policies and procedures.

Key ASFA provisions include a new emphasis on child health and safety in permanency planning, a shortened time frame for termination of parental rights (with an exemption for kinship care cases), and various incentives for adoption and other permanent arrangements. For the first time, these provisions recognize relative caregivers as permanency resources (Johns, 2000, p. 158). Under ASFA, legal guardianship has become sanctioned as a permanency option, and states can now drop or modify requirements to terminate parental rights when children are placed with relatives. Furthermore, the act requires states to notify relatives of foster care reviews and permanency planning hearings, an important gain for kinship caregivers (Hegar & Scannapieco, 2005, p. 521; Herger et al., 2002, pp. 6–7; Johns, 2000, p. 158; Welte, 1997, p. 1).

Critical to our discussion of federal kinship care policy is the relationship between mandated federal standards and the allocation of child welfare funds. The Administration for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services has been tasked with administering and overseeing federal funding to states for child welfare services included in the Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. Allocations for Title IV-B and IV-E funds, which are generally designated for foster care, include family preservations and community-based family supportive services as well as reimbursements for licensed foster parents (Herger et al., 2002). Under ASFA, federal mandates require states to license relative caregivers as foster parents in order to receive reimbursements for foster care payments through Title IV-E funds. Main et al (2006) discuss a positive implication of this policy change. They find that from 1997 to 2002, the standard of living for children in kinship care improved (operationalized by financial circumstances and health insurance rates), suggesting that in response to ASFA, states may have

(1) attempted to provide additional services and supports to help kin meet the licensing requirements and qualify for the higher payments, and (2) reduced their likelihood of placing children in kinship homes that could not meet the requirements (Main et al., 2006, p. 4).

In addition, ASFA has encouraged states to use Title IV-B and IV-E funds to achieve a wider range of child welfare goals by expanding the use of federal child welfare demonstration waivers. These waivers allow states to experiment with cost-neutral innovative foster and adoption practices (Herger et al., 2002, p. 8). Ohio's use of a Title IV-E demonstration waiver, for example, has resulted in significant changes in kinship care policy, which will be addressed in a later section.

It is important to note that the allocation of federal funds to state child welfare agencies depends upon their ability to achieve federally mandated performance outcomes associated with ASFA's primary goals. Both financial incentives and fiscal sanctions impact distribution of Title IV-B and IV-E funds. In 2000, the ACF established a federal review system to monitor and assess state compliance with federal child welfare laws (Herger et al., 2002, p. 5), and in 2001, the Department of Health and Human Services mandated reviews of federally funded child welfare services (including foster care) to assess states' performance in regards to permanency, safety, and child/family well-being. In an effort to increase accountability, they imposed fiscal sanctions on states that did not meet a set of standards related to foster care reentry rates, reunification rates, length of time in care, etc (Barbell & Freundlich, 2005, pp. 513–514). By basing Title IV-B and IV-E payment distribution upon states' outcome performance, the federal

government has put considerable pressure upon child welfare agencies to gear their policies towards ASFA goals and assessment measures.

Fostering Connections Act of 2008

The passage of the Fostering Connections Act in 2008 signaled a third landmark in child welfare legislation that has had an impact on kinship policies at both state and county levels. This act intended to improve outcomes for children in foster care or at risk of entering foster care (Fund & United, 2009, pp. 13–14).

Several aspects of the act have directly affected kinship caregivers nation-wide by giving states more opportunities to connect children in foster care with their kinship networks. For one, Fostering Connections requires agencies to notify relatives within 30 days of a child's removal from the parents' custody, giving relatives the opportunity to care for a child who would otherwise enter foster care, to act as the child's foster parent, or to support the child while he or she resides with another foster family. The act also includes new opportunities for financially supporting kinship caregivers. Not only does it give states the option to use Title IV-E funding to provide kinship guardianship assistance to relatives with legal guardianship of kin, but it also allows them to adjust non-safety licensing standards for kinship caregivers in order to distribute more Title IV-E reimbursable funds to kinship foster parents. Furthermore, states now have the options to use a Federal Parent Locator Service to identify relatives, to provide independent living services and educational and training vouchers for youth over the age of 16 who exit care to live with relatives, and to claim federal funding for short-term training of relative guardians who would not previously be trained using Title IV-E funds (Fund & United, 2009, p. 14).

Another significant provision of Foster Connections introduces a new type of competitive grant, called Family Connection Grants, for which states can apply. States that receive these grants must match a portion of the federal dollars and can use the money to fund four types of activities: (a) Kinship Navigator programs, which link relative caregivers to a range of services for the children and themselves, (b) Family Group Decision Making meetings, which enable families to make plans for nurturing and protecting children, (c) Intensive Family Finding efforts, which use search technology to locate relatives and explore permanent family placement options for children, and (d) Residential Family-Based Substance Abuse Treatment programs, which allow parents and children to receive comprehensive treatment related to substance abuse while living in a safe environment (Fund & United, 2009, pp. 28–29).

Variation in Agency Kinship Care Policies

In response to a growing number of children being removed from their homes, a decrease in available foster parents, a federal push for permanency, and a shifting ideology promoting family-centered child welfare, many states have begun to emphasize kinship/relative caregiving as a preferred placement option. The federal government, however, has given states considerable flexibility and limited guidance in implementation of kinship care programs, and the resulting state kinship care policies and agency practices reflect notable diversity (Geen, 2004, p. 137). Hegar and Scannapieco write that this high level of variation in state kinship policies can be attributed to a trend called "new federalism," under which the "devolution of authority to the states has led to extensive variation among states in funding and services for kinship foster care" (2005, p. 521).

Overall, nation-wide placement data suggests that states rely on kinship care to varying degrees. In some states, the proportion of foster children living with relatives exceeds the national average. In 2004, for example, 43% of California's foster care caseloads and 47% of Illinois' foster caseloads involved relative caregivers, whereas nationally, only 25% of foster children lived with relatives (Geen, 2004, p. 134). Not only do states differ in their level of reliance upon kinship caregivers, but they also exhibit distinctions between agencies' specific policies, programs, and procedures surrounding kinship care placements. Research surrounding U.S. kinship policy identifies variation across a number of state kinship care practices, including but not limited to: defining eligibility criteria for appropriate relative caregivers, identifying and recruiting kin, developing foster parent licensure and payment options, coordinating an array of services, and planning for permanency (Geen, 2003a; Hornby et al., 1996; Jantz, Geen, Bess, Andrews, & Russell, 2002). In some states, these differences manifest themselves at the county level as well. The current section introduces several elements of kinship policy and practice that, according to the body of literature, differ across state and county agencies.

Robert Geen, in a chapter titled "Kinship Foster Care: an Ongoing, Yet Largely Uninformed Debate," asserts that "very little information is available on how and when local child welfare agencies use kin as foster parents, how agencies' approach to kinship care differs from their approach to traditional foster care, and how local kinship care policies and practices vary across states," a phenomenon that makes it difficult for policymakers to evaluate the continuously developing kinship care policies throughout the nation (2003a, p. 1). Geen, in both his own articles and as part of an Urban Institute research team (Jantz et al., 2002), begins to fill

this gap in the literature by investigating evolving state kinship care policies. The paper titled “The Continuing Evolution of State Kinship Care Policies,” published in December of 2002 by Jantz et al as part of an Urban Institute project, provides an assessment of the changing social policies surrounding kinship care. In 2001, the team distributed a survey regarding state kinship foster care policies and found variation in states’ definitions of kin, ways of identifying kin, policies for kin’s involvement with the foster care system, payments of kin, treatment of nonadjudicated cases, permanency policies, and flexibility of kinship policy. In discussing the ways states use kinship care as a placement and/or permanency option, a study conducted by Hornby et al in 1996, which investigates the outcomes of kinship care policies in five states – New York, Colorado, Texas, California, and Illinois – addresses some comparable distinctions, including the custody status, level of supervision, and type/level of support provided to kinship families both inside and outside of the child welfare system.

The variables most commonly explored in the literature fall into three main categories: (1) defining and identifying kin, (2) use of kinship care upon removal, and (3) permanency planning with kinship caregivers. The following three subsections address the varying kinship policy characteristics in more detail.

Defining and Identifying Kin

The word “kin” is often used interchangeably with the word “relative,” implying a narrow definition of kin which includes only persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption; however, many agencies extend the definition of “kin” to include people beyond blood relatives who have had a prior relationship with the child. It is important to note that states have the option to

choose between these two distinct definitions of kin, and the definitions can impact individuals' treatment by agencies. According to Jantz et al, in 2001, almost the same number of states reported using the broad definition of kin as those defining kin in the narrower sense (p. 6). Some states document these definitions in state statutes, whereas many only list them in agency policy manuals or other locations, potentially resulting in varying levels of discretion in frontline practice. Interestingly, Jantz et al also find that in 28 states, child welfare and TANF use different definitions of kin; TANF definitions are generally narrower than those adopted by the child welfare agencies (2002, p. 7).

The literature highlights variation not only in the ways states define kin, but also in agencies' policies for identifying kin. An inter-state qualitative study conducted by Malm and Bess finds that when a child is removed from home, most states first look to noncustodial parents as a placement option, making especially great efforts to locate and assess noncustodial fathers. Relatives tend to be the next placement of choice (2003, p. 26). Malm and Bess find that states invest varying levels of effort in pursuing relative/kinship placements, noting that according to respondents, "local agency preference for kin varied and was influenced by a number of factors, including the extent to which agencies and workers value the extended family, specific agency policies, the courts, and a lack of non-kin foster homes" (2003, p. 30).

Overall, however, agencies seem to be making intentional efforts to identify and recruit kin to care for children in the child welfare system. The survey analyzed by Jantz et al asked states whether or not their policy specified how workers should identify kin, and they found that 35 states had an identification procedure. These states mentioned the use of various sources of

information, including parents, the child, other family members, family conferences, and court locator services (Jantz et al., 2002, p. 9). Other strategies for seeking out relative placements include consulting former caseworkers if the agency is familiar with the family, checking TANF and food stamps records, looking at the child's school records, and checking child abuse and neglect registries (Malm & Bess, 2003, p. 35). In Malm and Bess' study, worker practices in identifying and recruiting kin were fairly consistent from agency to agency (2003, p. 60).

Once relatives have been identified and express willingness to care for the child, agency staff must decide where to arrange the placement. States use varying procedures for choosing between kin if more than one relative steps forward; some prioritize by caregiver and home characteristics, others by relationship or birth family's choice (Jantz et al., 2002, p. 9).

According to the caseworkers included in the study by Malm and Bess, "preference for relatives is contingent on their ability to safely care for the child" (Malm & Bess, 2003, p. 32). The caseworkers note that the level of protection a relative can provide, determined by characteristics including relatives' prior knowledge of abuse or neglect and their willingness to believe the child's claims, is critical to the placement decision (p. 50-51). Kin are often also required to pass specific licensing standards, including various background checks. Furthermore, caseworkers consider relatives' bond with the child, their ability to care for a sibling group, and the proximity of their home to the child's neighborhood, as well as their "standard of care," which takes into account caregivers' financial concerns, age, and ability to care for children with special needs (p. 50-52).

The literature suggests that variation across state and agency policies for defining, identifying, and approving kin/relative placements may have important implications. As previously mentioned, a broad vs. narrow definition of kin directly impacts kinship families because agencies often provide different levels of support and supervision to kin than they do to non-kin caregivers. Factors related to identification and approval procedures have also been linked to various aspects of a child's placement experience. For example, Malm and Bess find that although kinship foster care has increasingly been seen as a way to reduce trauma for children in out-of-home care, children are frequently placed with relatives only after being initially placed elsewhere. Delays relate to licensing requirements, availability of relatives, and program supervisors' preferences for initial placement with non-kin (Malm & Bess, 2003, p. 58). On the other hand, Malm and Bess mention that "ASFA's emphasis on timely permanency appears to be a significant factor in the increased attention agencies are giving to identifying kin and noncustodial fathers early in the case planning process" (60). Critics raise the concern that the push for permanency, coupled with a shortage of non-kin foster home as well as a pressure to keep children out of shelter care, may be encouraging agencies to settle for marginal kinship placements (35). An agency's motives for pursuing kinship care may thus have a direct impact upon the quality and outcome of placements. The following section further addresses the various ways in which agencies use kinship care to achieve a range of goals.

Use of Kinship Care upon Removal

Following a child abuse or neglect investigation, if it is determined that the child cannot remain at home and an approved relative agrees to care for the child, the agency might attempt to

use kinship placement in one of several ways. Hornby et al emphasize that at this point, “the question with kinship care was not whether or not the child would be placed outside his or her *home*, but rather whether that placement would be considered to be inside or outside the *system*” (1996, p. 401). State and agency policies promote several types of formal and informal kinship placements, which correspond to particular technical statuses and varying levels of available support and supervision (Hegar & Scannapieco, 2005; Hornby et al., 1996; Jantz et al., 2002).

One way in which states are currently using kinship care is to divert families from juvenile court and formal placements. Based on a study involving a Kinship Foster Care Policy Survey distributed in 2007 as part of a Child Trends project, states are increasingly using relatives to care for abused and neglected children in order to avoid taking children into state custody. Thirty nine of the 50 states included in the study allowed caseworkers to seek out relatives for diversion from custody, and in 29 states, this practice was required (“Extended Families Hero Children Avoid Foster Care,” 2009, p. 1). The use of kinship care for diversion from foster care has a number of implications for kinship families. This traditional approach often creates informal kinship caregiving situations, in which services might be provided on a voluntary basis for a limited period of time. On one hand, proponents argue that these “voluntary” placements are less intrusive and promote family preservation (p. 1). On the other hand, diversion policies are generally associated with low levels of support and supervision (Hornby et al., 1996, p. 416). Children and families diverted from the system are generally offered significantly less support than relatives who care for children in the agency’s care (“Extended Families Hero Children Avoid Foster Care,” 2009, p. 1). Thus, diversion is

sometimes seen as a mechanism for denying support to minority families, as minority families are the most likely to take part in kinship caregiving (Hornby et al., 1996, p. 402). Furthermore, diversion policies may or may not require that relatives take on legal responsibility of the child (p. 402). From a fiscal perspective, this option has significant appeal for child welfare agencies, as it minimizes both maintenance payments and caseworker costs.

Agencies also have the option to maintain custody of the child while placing with a relative. In these situations, kin who meet specific eligibility criteria can become licensed as kinship foster parents and then receive child welfare services and special payments as determined by state policy (Hegar & Scannapieco, 2005, p. 521). In kinship foster care situations, the relative is able to play the role of a psychological parent without immediately becoming the child's legal parent (Hornby et al., 1996, p. 409). These arrangements can serve as short or long-term placements, and they generally correspond to high levels of support and supervision. This option is generally more expensive than diversion due to maintenance and staffing costs (Hornby et al., 1996, p. 416). According to the 2003 Children's Bureau findings, approximately one quarter of children in state custody were placed with kinship foster caregivers in 2003. This proportion, however, varied significantly across states and regions (Hegar & Scannapieco, 2005, pp. 521–522). Kinship foster care policies often depend upon states' licensure requirements for kinship foster parents (Boots & Geen, 1999).

A report published by Shelley Waters Boots and Robert Geen (1999) under the Urban Institute identifies states licensure and approval procedures for relative caregivers as one of the three primary ways in which state kinship policies differ. States with the most stringent

requirements require kin to become “fully licensed” by meeting the same licensure standards as non-kin foster parents (Boots & Geen, 1999, p. 2). According to Jantz et al.’s findings, these states require agencies to provide the same level of supervision and support for fully licensed kin foster parents as they do for licensed non-kin foster parents (2002, p. 10). Other states modify licensure requirements or make them less stringent for kinship caregivers. The most commonly waived requirements are space, training requirements, maximum caregiver age, and minimum income; others include transportation, marriage, and other standards that do not compromise the safety of the child. Of the states offering this option, most require agencies to provide the same level of support and supervision to kin and non-kin, with the exception of Georgia and Ohio. Ohio leaves these decisions to the discretion of its eighty-eight counties (Jantz et al., 2002, pp. 12–13). States also have the option to create a separate approval process, which typically has less stringent standards than those required of non-kin foster parents and correspond to varying levels of support and supervision. Potential components of the approval process include a background check, home study, income check, court approval, training, DMV training, physical and mental check, interviews, references, square footage requirements, etc (Jantz et al., 2002, pp. 14–15). Many states offer more than one of these three licensure options to their kinship caregivers (Boots & Geen, 1999, p. 2).

Although many state policies require agencies to provide the same level of support to kin and non-kin foster parents, Geen (2003) finds that in practice, kinship foster parents are receiving fewer services. After visiting thirteen study sites and interviewing workers, administrators, and kinship foster parents, he identified several common trends: workers offer fewer services to kin

than non-kin, kin request fewer services than non-kin, and kin experience greater barriers to accessing services. Related factors include caseworkers' heightened expectations for kin caregivers, caregivers' fears of appearing inept and/or preference for minimal intrusion, and kin's eligibility constraints and unfamiliarity with available resources (Geen, 2003c, p. 150).

Furthermore, it is important to note that although states have specific kinship care licensing and payment standards, local practices exhibit considerable variation. For example, although state policy may support licensure of kinship foster parents, local agencies across a given state might express varying levels of willingness to take custody of children placed with kin; some may refuse to license kinship foster parents while others may encourage it. Furthermore, family court judges in certain regions across a state may place children with unlicensed kin in states where licensure is technically required (Templeman, 2003, p. 90). A later discussion of Ohio's kinship policy in relation to both informal and formal placement arrangements will provide insight into this intra-state variation.

Permanency Planning with Kinship Caregivers

After a child has been removed from home and placed with kin, agencies may engage relatives in a process of planning for permanency. In child welfare policy and practice, permanency traditionally refers to a series of legal procedures that formalize long-term arrangements for children in out-of-home care. Permanency options for children living with kinship caregivers include reunification with biological parents, legal custody, adoption, legal guardianship, and long-term foster care, also known as PPLA. Agencies differ considerably in their approaches to permanency planning, and the few studies surrounding these practices offer

varying results (Hegar & Scannapieco, 2005, p. 523). Nevertheless, several trends do emerge, providing insight into various agency philosophies, policies, and practices surrounding permanency planning for kinship foster families. Overwhelmingly, the literature suggests that children in kinship foster care are less likely to reunify with their birth parents or undergo adoption than children placed with non-kin foster families (Geen, 2003a). They are more likely, on the other hand, to enter legal guardianship arrangements (Geen, 2003b, p. 160).

Researchers offer various explanations for reduced reunification rates among kinship foster families. After analyzing administrative data from a medium-sized California county's child welfare agency, Pabustan-Claar (2007) attributes these low reunification rates to longer kinship placement lengths, which in turn may relate to "the different needs and resources experienced by family members – children, parents, and relative caregivers – that the child welfare system must begin to recognize and address" (Pabustan-Claar, 2007, p. 85). She elaborates that although kinship caregivers seem to need more support, they often receive less contact, supervision, and services than non-kin foster parents. Pabustan-Claar lists other potential factors as well, including relatives' lack of warning or preparation for dealing with the child welfare system, the use of emergency "shelter homes" (licensed foster homes) as a temporary first placement preceding placement in a kinship home, and CPS staff's low reunification efforts for children placed with kin (p. 86). In studies conducted by Murphy (2008) and O'Brien et al (2001), relative caregivers affirm that agencies often hinder reunification efforts for children in their care, criticizing the system for failing to meet the needs of the birthparents and their children.

Various child and caregiver characteristics have also been associated with reduced reunification rates. According to the literature review introducing Meezan and McBeath's study (2008), young, neglected, African American children with physical and mental health service needs have been found to reunify at especially low rates. Studies comparing child characteristics across kin and non-kin placements have found that young, African American children who experience neglect are also more likely to be placed with kin than non-kin foster families (Meezan & McBeath, 2008, p. 391). Koh and Testa (2008) account for the impact of preexisting group differences and selection bias in their comparison of permanency outcomes for children in care by using a Propensity Score Matching technique to match characteristics of children in kin and non-kin foster care. Prior to propensity score matching, children in kin placements were found to be older, more likely to be African American, and less likely to have disabilities. In the unmatched sample, children in kinship care were less likely to achieve reunification or adoption and were more likely to be discharged into legal guardianship, a finding that the literature generally supports. After propensity score matching, however, most of the differences in permanency outcomes became statistically insignificant, although kin placements were still slightly more likely than non-kin placements to end up in legal guardianship and less likely to result in adoption. The findings suggest that the relationship between kinship placements and low reunifications may, indeed, have more to do with a child's age, race, and disability status than on the type of placement itself.

Research surrounding kinship caregiver adoption rates also presents a range of findings. Several studies link kinship care to high adoption levels (Gleeson, 1996; Murphy, 2008); however, the majority find that kinship caregivers are significantly less likely to adopt than non-

kin foster parents (Geen, 2003a). Caregivers' unwillingness to adopt emerges as a common explanation for these low adoption rates. For example, Thornton's (1991) interviews with twenty kinship foster parents who were predominantly black, Protestant residents of New York suggest that relatives were significantly opposed to the idea of adopting their related foster children because they felt that adoption was unnecessary and would cause conflict with biological parents. Most respondents were committed to caring for the children long-term, however, and were aware of the available adoption subsidy.

In a discussion of cases for which adoption was not the permanency goal, Gleeson, O'Donnell, and Bonecutter affirm Thornton's findings, identifying ambivalence about adoption, reluctance to replace biological parents, and a new factor, tensions between caregivers and the child welfare system, as reasons caregivers were unwilling to adopt (1997, p. 813). Two qualitative studies involving predominantly African American females, one conducted by O'Brien et al (2001) and the second by Murphy (2008), support these findings and raise additional concerns about adoption by relatives. The respondents express mistrust for a system that they felt had been intrusive, unresponsive to their needs, and misleading with information surrounding costs and service availability. They also identified other practical and identity-related implications of adopting their relatives. Caregivers in O'Brien's study were apprehensive about taking on legal responsibility for children with potential health problems without assurance of future support. In Murphy's study, some caregivers express discomfort with the agency's expectation for them to take on the title "momma" as opposed to "grandma," while others say that they would like the option to adopt but feel as though the agency has taken on the role of "momma." Murphy finds that, "African American grandmothers use their cultural traditions and

history as the lens through which they interpret, critique, and negotiate their relationship with the child welfare system” (p. 84). This relationship seems to play an important role in caregivers’ preferences regarding the ultimate permanency planning decision.

Naturally, agency and staff attitudes towards adoption by relatives also have a significant impact upon the prevalence of adoption as a permanency plan. In Thornton’s study, caseworkers generally agreed with kinship foster parents, acknowledging that adoption may not be the most appropriate permanency outcome for kinship cases. In Gleeson et al’s study of an agency located in Illinois, however, caseworkers did actively pursue adoption as a permanency goal, and after interviewing caseworkers regarding 77 kinship foster care cases, Gleeson et al found that caseworkers had discussed adoptions with kinship caregivers for 81% of the cases, and kinship caregivers were willing to consider adoption in 66% of the 62 cases where adoption was discussed (1997, p. 812). For this sample, it seems as though relatives may not have been offered alternative options for long-term care of their kin, as some caseworkers explained to relatives that if they did not wish to adopt, the agency would look for another home for the child (p. 813). Caseworkers identify caregivers’ inability to provide long-term support without continued supervision from the child welfare system due to age, illness, or caregiving capacity as the most common reason for adoption not being seen as an appropriate goal (p. 812). Overall, this agency seemed to exert pressure upon able kinship caregivers to pursue adoption.

Although permanency outcomes have traditionally been measured by reunification or adoption rates, the literature suggests that this definition of permanency may not be appropriate for kinship cases. Mainly due to caregivers’ apprehension towards adoption, studies have recommended a move away from policies that emphasize legal adoption by grandparents towards

an emphasis on guardianship, and research suggests that states are increasingly seeing guardianship as a permanency option for kinship families. Based on a study involving 96 focus groups of child welfare workers and caregivers as well as interviews with agency administrators, advocates, and local service providers, Geen finds that in almost all of the thirteen sites (spanning Alabama, California, Connecticut, and Indiana) visited by his team, guardianship was seen as the preferred and most common permanency outcome for kinship families (Geen, 2003b, p. 160). Some states, however, continue to push adoption over guardianship (p. 161-162). In 1999, 25 states offered subsidized guardianship under a range of circumstances and using various funding sources; by 2001, the number of states increased to 35 and has never included Ohio (Jantz et al., 2002, p. 33).

When reunification, adoption, and legal guardianship are not seen as viable options, long-term foster care is sometimes considered as an alternative permanent arrangement for kinship families. Jantz et al find that in 2002, 43 states allowed children under particular (state-specific) circumstances to remain in long-term kinship foster care (p. 31-32). According to Geen, long-term foster care is generally discouraged, but in three of the four states included in his study, workers, administrators, and judges claim that keeping children in long-term kinship foster care is a common practice, especially for older children (2003b, p. 158). This permanency option is appealing because it allows the child to live with their caregivers indefinitely; however, Hornby explains that “long-term support is the option most antithetical to the system’s view of kinship care” because it contradicts child welfare’s view of itself as a system of temporary care. This option is the most expensive and demands ongoing state involvement and supervision (Hornby et

al., 1996, p. 408). Adoption or guardianship, if available, will therefore typically over-rule long-term foster care (Geen, 2003b, p. 158).

This section has addressed permanency options that follow foster care placement with a relative or kin. Kinship permanency planning research is young, however, and limited by its varying definitions of “kinship” care, distinct samples, lack of adequate comparison groups, range of sample sizes, and lack of standardized measures, which make it difficult for researchers to compare results or generalize their findings (Pabustan-Claar, 2007, p. 62). Furthermore, by comparing kin to non-kin foster families, these studies do not consider informal permanency outcomes, although many states now pursue the voluntary transfer of legal custody to kin in order to divert children from the formal foster care system (“Extended Families Hero Children Avoid Foster Care,” 2009, p. 1).

Beyond the scope of permanency planning, kinship policy research exhibits clear geographic limitations, and the findings do not appear to be generalizable to all states throughout the nation. Hornby et al (1996) use a sample of only five states, which, although selected for diversity of policy and practice, limits the relevance of their findings for states outside of the sample. Their multi-dimensional framework and newly proposed permanency outcomes, however, will inform the current study’s analysis of Ohio’s various kinship care policies. Geen (2003) as well as Jantz et al (2002), on the other hand, do include all fifty states in their study of kinship care policies. Nevertheless, their assessment also fails to sufficiently describe kinship care throughout the entire U.S. because surveys conducted at the state level cannot capture the variation in policy and practice occurring across agencies in county-based child welfare systems, such as in Ohio. The following section attempts to isolate distinguishing kinship policy

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characteristics and trends in the context of one state – Ohio – by reviewing the literature addressing Ohio kinship care.

Kinship Care Policy in Ohio

Within the context of evolving federal child welfare legislation, Ohio emerges as unique system of county-based agencies with a range of kinship policies. The following section includes a demographic profile of Ohio grandparent caregivers in 1999 and an overview of relevant state policy, as well as a discussion of several evaluations that have assessed the implementation of Ohio kinship policy in various counties across the state.

According to the Ohio Resource Guide for Relatives Caring for Children (2012), Census data indicates that in the year 2000, 185,433 children lived with their grandparents throughout the state of Ohio. In 1999, the Ohio Department of Aging issued a report titled “Grandparents Raising Grandchildren,” which identified the characteristics and needs of thousands of Ohio grandparent caregivers. The study found that 87% of grandparent caregivers were female while 13% were male, and that these grandparents were on average 55 years old. Fifty-one percent live in households with incomes below \$30,000, and 45% were employed, while 22% were retired, disabled, or unemployed.

Over the past few decades, Ohio has developed a set of kinship care policies and programs intended to provide public support for grandparents and other kinship caregivers across the state. The following table, drawn from a report published by the Human Services Research

Institute (2012), outlines the history of kinship support policy in Ohio from 1997 to 2012. An explanation of key initiatives ensues.

Table 1: Timeline of Kinship Support Policy in Ohio		
YEAR	EVENT	RESULT
1997	Welfare reform legislation	Guarantee of TANF child-only cash assistance without work requirement or time limitation. <i>Caregivers can apply through the Ohio Works First (OWF) program.</i>
1999	Dept. of Aging Grandparents Raising Grandchildren report	Research with thousands of grandparent families provided the field with information on characteristics and needs of grandparent caregivers.
	Kinship Navigator Program established	Kinship Caregiver access to services is improved via designation of Kinship Navigator staff in all Ohio counties, supported by TANF funding.
	Kinship Caregiver Advisory Board established	Strategic plan to continue to assess needs, educate the public, further policy development, and otherwise advise the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) on kinship programming.
2003	House Bill 130 passed by General Assembly and signed by Governor	Created tools for Grandparent caregivers without legal custody of children in their care: Caregiver Authorization Affidavit (CAA) and Power of Attorney (POA); provides Grandparent caregivers legal documentation for educational purposes and emergency/regular medical needs, while still allowing birth parents to reassume all rights at any time.
2004	ODJFS approved the Relative and Non-relative Approval Process	Created regulations for kinship home approval focused on basic health and safety standards, including criminal background checks, without rigid foster care licensure requirements
	2 nd period for Title IV-E ProtectOhio Waiver 2004-2010	18 county PCSAs participate in IV-E waiver demonstration, adopted kinship supports as one of the four key strategies.
2005	Kinship Permanency Incentive program (KPI)	Statewide program consisting of a series of payments over 36 months to kinship caregivers who have assumed legal custody or guardianship. Funded at \$5 Million/year over time with TANF and/or State General Revenue sources; reduced to \$3.2 M/year SFY 2012, thus reducing benefits. Currently supports nearly 8,000 children living in safe permanent kin homes.
2009	Fostering Connections Grand awarded to a group of seven counties and PCSAO	Grant provided funding for seven counties to develop or enhance existing Kinship Navigator Programs

2011	3 rd period for Title IV-E ProtectOhio Waiver 2011-2016	ProtectOhio Consortium counties committed resources to improved agency Kinship Strategy addressing structure, practice, manual creation, and training – to all open child welfare cases in which the child is living with a kin caregiver regardless of custody status. Improved SACWIS data fields, documentation and consistency for kin cases also implemented.
2012	HB 279 passed by General Assembly and signed by Governor	Improved Grandparent POA and CAAs, gives those grandparents standing in court to seek custody if parent removes child; incorporates the 30-day relative notice provision and sibling placement provision from the Foster Connections to Success Act of 2008, allows use of Ohio’s putative father locator tool for paternal family search beyond infant adoptions; calls for a feasibility study of the Title IV-E Relative Guardianship Subsidy option

**Additions to original table are in italics* (Human Services Research Institution, 2012, pp. 2–3)

Several of the above-listed initiatives warrant further explanation. As the table indicates, kinship caregivers in Ohio may be eligible to apply to receive financial support from two state programs: the Kinship Permanency Incentive Program and the Ohio Works First program. According to the Ohio Resource Guide for Relatives Caring for Children, receiving KPI payments does not exclude an eligible relative caregiver from also receiving child-only TANF benefits through OWF (2012, pp. 16–17). In 2012, the TANF child-only grant provided \$268 per month for the first child and \$93 a month for each additional child cared for by eligible kinship caregivers. The KPI program gave qualifying families an initial payment of \$450 per child, followed by \$250 per child every six months afterwards for a total of 36 months (“Ohio’s Continuum of Care: Kinship, Foster and Adoptive Families,” 2012).

Ohio also allocates a portion of its TANF block grant to fund two programs not included in the table: the Prevention, Retention, and Contingency Program (PRC), which provides short-term crisis-oriented benefits and on-going services for families that can include kinship families, and the Emergency Services Assistance Allocation (ESAA) program, which attempts to prevent

removal and promote reunification by providing direct support to at-risk children and families. Both funding sources are often used to pay for hard goods and services for families at risk of child removal (Human Services Research Institution, 2012, p. 3).

From 1997 to the present, Ohio has also taken advantage of opportunities to experiment with Title IV-E flexible funding, creating initiatives that continue to impact kinship caregivers in multiple counties across the state. These include three 5-year waiver periods of Ohio's Title IV-E Child Welfare Demonstration project, called ProtectOhio, as well as an Enhanced Kinship Navigator Program, funded by the Fostering Connections grant in 2009. Fourteen counties were involved in ProtectOhio from 1997 to 2002, and eighteen counties chose to participate in the later waiver periods. The grant funding the Kinship Navigator Program was awarded to PCSAO and seven counties, all of which are included in ProtectOhio. Several assessments have been conducted by the HSRI to evaluate the policies, programs, and outcomes of agencies involved in these initiatives. The reported findings provide valuable insight into kinship care policies at Ohio's county level.

When ProtectOhio was first implemented in October of 1997, its primary goals were to reduce the number of children entering care, decrease the amount of time they stay in care, decrease the number of placements they experience in care, and increase reunification and permanent placement outcomes (Kimmich et al., 2010, p. 7). Although the goals have not changed, the ProtectOhio focus shifted with the extension granting a second waiver period. The second waiver required participating agencies to focus on two or more specific interventions,

choosing from: family team meetings, supervised visitation, kinship supports, enhanced mental health substance abuse services, and managed care (p. 7).

Six counties chose “kinship supports” as one of their emphasized service interventions. In a chapter titled “Kinship Strategy” in the evaluation report of ProtectOhio’s second waiver period (2004-2005), HSRI gathered data from the eighteen ProtectOhio counties and seventeen comparison counties and was able to classify agency-level differences in kinship policy structure and practice using three main categories: staffing, identification and recruitment of kinship caregivers, and services and supports for kinship caregivers (assessment of needs, availability of goods and services, financial supports, and other supports). After comparing policy and outcomes for three groups of counties – ProtectOhio agencies that adopted a Kinship Strategy focus, ProtectOhio counties that did not choose to emphasize Kinship Strategy, and a sample of non-demonstration comparison counties – they found that kinship counties experienced a shift in agency culture towards one that emphasizes the value of kinship placements, as well as more efforts to utilize and support kin, more positions designated for kinship caregiver support, more provision of hard goods to relatives, increased use of Family Team Meetings, higher proportions of placements with kinship caregivers, a higher likelihood of relatives receiving legal custody, decreased likelihood of reunification, and an increase in the length of time in placement. Kinship counties did not exhibit enhanced identification/recruitment efforts for kinship caregivers or provision of additional financial support. Furthermore, the team found no evidence that increased use of kinship care following the first waiver period had an impact on reentry rates, “helping to alleviate the concern that a focus on reducing placement usage might lead to

children being discharged too soon and needing to re-enter foster care” (Kimmich et al., 2010, p. 287).

The seven agencies participating in Ohio’s Enhanced Kinship Navigator Program have adopted a different but perhaps complementary set of kinship-related goals: to enhance the counties’ kinship navigator programs in their local communities, improve and integrate services and supports for a broad range of kinship families (regardless of custody status or agency involvement), and demonstrate that providing additional support to kinship caregivers reduces foster care placements and promotes child safety (Human Services Research Institution, 2012, pp. 1, 6). HSRI found that the seven agencies involved in the project attempted to achieve these goals by improving information about and access to necessary services and supports such as legal assistance, support groups, respite care, financial assistance, and short-term child care, by engaging in system-level interagency partnership in order to collaborate and create a sustainable service delivery system that supports kinship families, and by increasing Kinship Navigator positions, a role which, as the name implies, requires assisting kinship caregivers in navigating the system of available services and supports (p. 6). This initiative marks the most dramatic impact of Fostering Connections legislation upon Ohio’s state kinship policy.

According to the project’s evaluation, conducted in 2012 by HSRI, Kinship Navigator counties exhibit variation in staffing, distribution of resources, and case management. Overall, however, the research team finds that the Fostering Connections grant has enabled counties to support a broader range of caregivers, develop new contracts with local providers, and fund Kinship Navigator positions which allow kinship navigator staff to craft creative new solutions

for addressing caregivers' needs. Families were made more aware of available resources, and the majority of caregivers reported high satisfaction with Kinship Navigator programs. The outcomes data used in this study is limited due to its reliance on SACWIS, Ohio's online reporting system, which excludes a significant portion of the voluntary kinship families served by KN programs. The findings suggest, however, that children living with kin served by the KN program were safe, had a lower likelihood of placement change than the same county's non-kin placements, and experienced lower rates of re-reports (Human Services Research Institution, 2012, p. 59).

Both HSRI reports provide valuable insight into kinship care policy and practice across Ohio. By engaging in long-term research projects using a variety of data sources, the teams were able to conduct thorough assessments for the ProtectOhio and Kinship Navigator programs. By definition, the reports are, however, technical evaluations. Although they consider a variety of policy and outcome measures, neither report investigates the causes and implications of kinship policy variation across the state of Ohio. They examine only 38 of the 88 Ohio counties, excluding multiple agencies with distinct sets of policies, programs, and philosophies. The current study attempts to fill some of these gaps in Ohio kinship policy research.

A Theoretical Framework for Analyzing Kinship Care Policy

Within a dynamic socio-historical context, state and county agencies have instituted a range of policies and procedures pertaining to the kinship caregivers of children who have been removed from the homes of their birthparents due to allegations of abuse or neglect. The current chapter presents a model for conceptualizing modern child welfare agencies in relation to these kinship care providers. It integrates the unique theoretical perspectives of Emile Durkheim, Michel Foucault, Axel Honneth, and Patricia Hill Collins to construct a strategy for studying the genesis, functioning, and implications of modern kinship care practices. A vivid description of the modern context draws from Durkheim's and Foucault's discussions of modernity and neoliberalism. Within this context, a discussion of the institutionalization of moral discourses and functioning of modern child welfare institutions ensues, to which Honneth and Collins offer considerable complexity by elaborating upon these institutions' relationships to modern individuals. Finally, Foucault provides a platform for investigating the outcomes of kinship care policies as active components of apparatuses of discourses and power, which impose enduring consequences upon individuals' lived experiences.

The Theoretical Context

Durkheim's functionalist portrayal of modern society provides a foundation for the macrosociological framework that informs this report. Sociology, according to Durkheim, "can be defined as the science of institutions, their genesis and functioning" (1895/1972c, p. 71). His sociological project, taking the form of an objective, scientific study of institutions, provides a

preliminary platform for making sense of the range of variables and facts pertaining to modern child welfare. According to Durkheim, institutions serve to integrate and regulate society by instituting laws, beliefs, religions, moral regulations, modes of conduct, and other social practices, also known as social facts, which are endorsed by the collectivity and relate to purely social phenomena. Their function “can only be social, that is to say, it consists in the production of socially useful effects” (Durkheim, 1895/1972c, p. 74). In order to understand the genesis and functioning of Durkheim’s modernity, it is therefore essential to approach our study of institutions as socially and historically evolving phenomena that shape human existence but reside outside of individual consciousness.

Foucault’s genealogical endeavors aspire to a comparable goal of explaining socially and historically specific forms that integrate “components of actualized representational systems, bodies, practices, and a range of social institutions, all of which are said to be altogether affected by their combination” (Datta, 2008, p. 285). Both Durkheim and Foucault reject the neo-Kantian tendencies of ontological formalism and humanistic anthropomorphism, which attempt to explain social life in terms of a static, valorized, ahistorical individual. Instead, they treat people as figures to be studied through non-humanistic, socio-historical analysis, emphasizing “the immanence of structure and process” (Datta, 2008, p. 290). Foucault’s post-structural conception of modernity thus proves complementary to Durkheim’s but introduces the impact of politics, economic forces, and disciplinary discourses upon the modern web of social relations. His theoretical contributions will be drawn upon to enhance the complexity of our social, historical, political, and economic context.

This theoretical discussion of kinship care policy begins with a description of Durkheimian-Foucauldian modernity. According to Durkheim, modern societies exhibit a decline in family-based social systems, a high division of labor, and a progressive development of individualism, as well as various historically specific phenomena including private property, contractual relations, citizenship, and the democratic political state (Ramp, 2001, p. 91). He affirms Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* typology for societies, agreeing that modern *Gesellschaft* societies, which have evolved from traditional *Gemeinschaft* societies, exhibit a dramatic shift in the organization of social worlds, as well as in their type of solidarity (Durkheim, 1893/1972f, p. 146). Due in large part to a heightened differentiation of labor, individuals in modernity develop occupational spheres and must depend upon one another's specialized functions in order to maintain an organic form of solidarity (Durkheim, 1893/1972b, pp. 138–139). Ramp asserts that from Durkheim's perspective, this shift to modernity has entailed "a new attitude toward history, political and social purpose" (Ramp, 2001, p. 91). We look to Foucault for a deeper understanding of modernity's organization and purpose.

Foucault endorses this *Gesellschaft* typology for societies, while elaborating upon an additional phenomenon in modernity – the development of neoliberalism. According to Foucault, American neoliberalism differs from German and French neoliberalism due to various contextual elements that have shaped its development, including: the New Deal and its critiques, war-time projects of economic and social interventionism (such as the Beveridge Plan), and growth of programs on poverty, education, and segregation during the Truman through Johnson administrations (1979/2008, pp. 216–217). Foucault asserts that liberalism is a founding

principle of the American state and remains a core component of American political debate; he writes, “Liberalism in America is a whole way of being and thinking. It is a type of relation between the governors and the governed much more than a technique of governors with regard to the governed” (1979/2008, p. 218). Foucault characterizes American neoliberalism as a complete generalization of market-based economic forms throughout the social system. By discussing the way neoliberalism has seeped into non-economic domains and affected modern discourse, he provides a framework for analysis and evaluation of social relations, governmental action, and individual behavior (Foucault, 1979/2008, p. 246).

As the market, law, and people bind together in an American neoliberal context, the individual becomes increasingly governable while simultaneously emerging as an active economic and political subject (Foucault, 1979/2008, pp. 252, 230). He engages in a system of power relations, which Foucault attempts to unpack over the course of his sociological endeavors. While lecturing at the College de France on January 14, 1976, Foucault explains, “Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (Foucault, 1976/1980, p. 98). Foucault treats individuals as necessary and active participants of modern systems of power, advocating a bottom-up approach to analyzing modernity. He refuses to provide a macro-sociological explanation for the emergence of modern social relations, embracing instead the contingency of historical change, which he attributes to

the congealing of disciplines and practices in response to socio-historically specific “haphazard conflicts” (Brenner, 1994, pp. 688–689). The functional imperatives for his power apparatuses come “from below,” reflecting discourses which remain bound to particular social, political, and economic conditions (Brenner, 1994, p. 688).

Foucault’s methodology would thus appear to fundamentally conflict with Durkheim’s functionalist approach, which looks to facts that arise with the division of labor and function to serve the overarching society instead of its individual members (1895/1972c, p. 74). Their objectives, however, may not be entirely contradictory. Neil Brenner suggests that Foucault’s theorization of power introduces a new type of functionalism that depicts power arrangements as systems of coordinated tactics aimed at historically specific targets, or needs. From this perspective, Foucault offers “a tool for studying both the functional imperatives (‘urgent needs’) of different social formations and the complex processes, embedded deep within the social nexus, through which these imperatives are satisfied” (Brenner, 1994, p. 687). Foucault’s power apparatuses emerge as functional systems intended to bring about the “ordering of human multiplicities” (Brenner, 1994, p. 680). Durkheim and Foucault therefore not only attribute comparable characteristics to modernity, but they also provide a functionalist framework for studying socio-historically specific modern institutions.

Durkheim and Foucault’s macrosociological phenomena do not occur in isolation from microsociological realities. Even Durkheim, the father of functionalism, notes that, “We cannot stop the individual having become what he is – an autonomous centre of activity, an imposing system of personal forces whose energy can no more be destroyed than that of cosmic force. It

would be just as impossible to transform the physical atmosphere in the midst of which we breathe” (Durkheim, 1950/1972e, p. 196). Both theorists acknowledge that modern societies cannot flourish unless their individual members continue living, interacting, producing, and transforming in relation to their evolving circumstances and needs; however, some argue that they fail to sufficiently explain how society’s conditions, disciplines, practices, and institutions actually shape the behavior and experiences of modern individuals (Brenner, 1994, p. 701). Our discussion of modern moral discourse therefore draws upon Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition and Patricia Hill Collins’ Black Feminist theory to provide deeper insight into the ways in which the individual relates to social institutions situated within the complex modern context.

The Child Welfare Institution - A System of Moral Discourses

According to Durkheim, “all of the beliefs and modes of conduct instituted by the collectivity” comprise the institutions which this sociological project must now begin to investigate (Durkheim, 1895/1972c, p. 71). Within a neoliberal context, child welfare agencies and their respective kinship policies emerge as simultaneously moral and social institutions that affirm the sentiments of a modern general collective. These sentiments, termed moral facts by Durkheim, are bound up with other moral and social facts throughout the entire world system (1893/1972d, p. 120-121). By nature, Durkheim’s institutions thus play a critical role in the moral reality which shapes social life, and if morality “is allowed to remain bound to the reality of which it is a part, it appears as a vital and complex function of the social organism” (1887/1972d, p. 95, 1906/1972g, p. 117). By integrating Foucault’s, Honneth’s, and Collins’

theoretical perspectives into Durkheim's functionalist framework, this section addresses multiple dimensions of the moral discourses which shape child welfare policy.

A Durkheimian perspective allows us to address the genesis and functionality of the social and moral facts comprising modern child welfare institutions; Foucault's contributions, on the other hand, extend this discussion to illuminate "both the question of intent and that of consequence" in relation to evolving kinship care policies (Ramp, 2001, p. 105). Simon Biggs and Jason L. Powell addresses the implications of the shifting child welfare discourses within Foucault's theoretical framework, writing:

It is not by chance that an increased focus on risk in social work has coincided with the decline in trust in social workers' expertise, decision-making through psychoanalytical insights, and a growing reliance on increasingly complex systems of managerialism with older people themselves as "consumers" of services. Such a development has constituted a conducive framework based on the language of the market and its pragmatic management as opposed to trust in social scientific discourse, although preceding emphases on psychoanalytic can be brought in from time to time to reinforce an individualized notion of personal responsibility (2001, p. 13).

Biggs cites Foucault's theory of Power and Knowledge, which emphasizes the power relations that permeate the social body due to their reflexive relationship with the production and functioning of discourse (Foucault, 1976/1980, p. 93). A discourse, within Foucault's framework, relates to the construction and institutionalization of truth, like the previously discussed moral facts encoded in child welfare institutions. Foucault clarifies that this concept is not synonymous to an ideology; in fact, "it is both much more and much less than ideology. It is the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge – methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research,

apparatuses of control” (Foucault, 1976, p. 102). Foucault directs his attention towards these complex mechanisms of power, termed *dispositifs*, which codify a variety of competing discourses and thus manifest themselves in the policies of modern institutions.

These networks of power did not exist when strongly defined states of conscience collective were able to institute shared moral codes and practices (Durkheim, 1893/1972f, pp. 144–145). Postmodernity, however, “is the condition we are in now, a condition where there is no operative consensus concerning the ultimate or transcendental grounds of truth and justice” (Yeatman, 1991, p. 116). With the weakening of the conscience collective, more room has been left available for individual sentiments and ways of thought, until eventually, individualism has taken on a moral character, replacing old faiths with a new shared ideal that sanctifies individual rights (Durkheim, 1893/1972f, p. 146). Within this individualized, neoliberal context, distinct discourses pertaining to recognition, mutual obligation, and the market have emerged in the realm of child welfare. The following three sections undertake a theoretical investigation of the causes, implications, and intersections of these three competing moral discourses. Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition introduces the discussion by explaining why, according to Durkheim’s account of modernity, “whoever makes an attempt on a man’s life, on a man’s liberty, on a man’s honour, inspires us with a feeling of revulsion, in every way comparable to that which the believer experiences when he sees his idol profaned” (Durkheim, 1898/1972f, p. 149). Honneth’s microsociological insights reflect the first string of moral discourse affirmed by modern child welfare institutions: the discourse of recognition.

A Right to Recognition

Honneth's microsociological model (1996), which has been widely cited across social work literature, builds upon the theories of Hegel and Mead in order to explain how interpersonal relationships satisfy individuals' psychological needs and allow modern actors to develop functional identities as integrated members of society. Houston asserts that Honneth's model is especially relevant when we consider the practical value of social support in situations involving vulnerable children and families; he writes, "Social ties and networks of social support represent the 'human playing pitch,' or material ground, on which Honneth's ideas on recognition are played out" (Houston & Dolan, 2007, p. 463). In a chapter titled, "Love, Rights, and Solidarity," Honneth emphasizes a universal human need for three types of mutual recognition in day-to-day interactions: affectionate care (love), legal recognition (rights), and social esteem (solidarity). The right to recognition emerges as a moral discourse characterizing modern child welfare.

The case of child abuse and neglect stands as a stark example of denial of recognition, defined by Honneth as a type of disrespect. In his essay titled, "Personal Identity and Disrespect," Honneth defines physical maltreatment, through which "a person is forcibly deprived of any opportunity freely to dispose over his or her own body," as the most degrading form of disrespect because of the severe impact that this type of violence can have upon the victim's relationship to him- or herself (2013, p. 459). In addition to inflicting physical pain upon the child, domestic abuse deprives the victim of a sense of autonomous control over his or her body, damages basic confidence, and destroys trust in oneself and the world. The implications of this type of disrespect are therefore profound. They relate to the denial of our

three types of recognition, disrupting the child's ability to develop self-confidence (which should be learned through love), self-respect (losing the right over one's body), and self-esteem (which is replaced by social shame), three important components of a well-developed identity.

Modernity's response to this form of disrespect affirms that the collective defines child abuse as a serious moral transgression demanding imposition of restitutive sanctions. By instituting the shared moral fact, child welfare and juvenile court systems have historically functioned to regulate immoral human behavior and promote social solidarity (Durkheim, 1893/1972b, pp. 123–128). Hutchison agrees, claiming that in the case of child welfare, “institutions are needed to keep the peace between divergent interests and to provide for sharing of resources” (1987, p. 594). With prescribed moral authority, courts and legal institutions address the integrative problems surrounding child abuse by defining and interpreting Honneth's “standards of a decent society,” serving as “a necessary element in the linkage between recognition and rights, especially in the case of what Honneth terms dis-respect” (Morris, 2012, p. 53).

From Honneth's recognition-based perspective, the child welfare system emerges as an institution which functions to affirm an agreed-upon right to recognition; however, as the post-modern welfare state loses centrality and the right to recognition extends to a wider range of individuals, including the child's kinship circle, new discourses emerge and the institution's form of governance evolves (Yeatman, 1991, p. 118). Durkheim predicts this shift, writing, “the more abstract and indeterminate the rules of conduct and thought, the more conscious direction must intervene to apply them to particular cases. But the latter cannot awaken without dissensions occurring, for as it varies from one man to another in quality and quantity, it inevitably leads to

this result. Centrifugal tendencies thus multiply at the expense of social cohesion and the harmony of actions” (1893/1972f, p. 145). In the wake of moral individualism, competition between dissenting moral claims destabilizes the traditional centrist culture of needs formation and infiltrates the policies and ideologies defining modern child welfare institutions (Yeatman, 1991, p. 117).

This corresponds to a shift in the individual’s political role, for “if he is the moral reality, then it is he who must serve as the axis of public as well as private conduct. It should be the role of the state to help him to release his nature” (Durkheim, 1950/1972e, p. 195). As the social and historical context changes, reflexive relationships between individuals and modern institutions also evolve, transforming involved persons into political actors and bureaucratizing traditionally private spheres of social life (Yeatman, 1991, p. 119). A child’s extended kinship network, now an integral part of the complex, functioning institution, thus enters the political arena, within which both the family and agency staff “need not simply to follow the rules that legitimize what they can say and do, but also to work on themselves so that each can become the sort of person who can be seen and heard within that discourse” (Biggs & Powell, 2001, p. 7). From Honneth’s theoretical perspective, this individualization of achievement derails the common value-system that has traditionally served as a reference point for assessment of social esteem. Within the modern system of recognition relationships, a caregiver’s social standing becomes defined by “the degree of social recognition the individual earns for his or her form of self-realization by thus contributing, to a certain extent, to the practical realization of society’s abstractly defined goals” (Honneth, 1996, p. 126). A struggle for social esteem thus gives rise to a new type of moral discourse infiltrating modern child welfare institutions: that of mutual obligation.

The Discourse of Mutual Obligation

Yeatman defines the idea of mutual obligation as “an element of populist commonsense: that individuals should make a contribution to society in exchange for the support society gives them” (Yeatman, 2000, p. 156). Policies of mutual obligation pathologize dependency while promoting a client-agency partnership grounded in reciprocity. As Yeatman points out, however, “Durkheim argued that the voluntary dimension of contract (or choice) can work on behalf of social order only to the extent that it is informed by a normative adherence to the behaviors on which social order depends” (2000, p. 163). Furthermore, according to Murphy, “when rules and policies constructed from an etic perspective enter the intimate space of family life, the inherent power of state-based institutions may infringe upon, shape, or transform the experiences at the individual and family levels” (2008, p. 69). Patricia Hill Collins considers the implications of this new contractual model, illuminating the tensions that arise when agencies’ normative expectations and traditional family rhetoric misalign with African American women’s situated knowledge claims.

In her discussion of Black Feminist Thought, Collins situates social relations within a matrix of domination that interlocks gender, race, and class oppression (1990, p. 2). She criticizes the pervasiveness of a Eurocentric masculinist perspective, identifying ways in which dominant forms of specialized thought have been used to control aspects of subordinate group members’ daily lives (1990, p. 5). Honneth attributes the emergence of this problematic value-system to the individualization of achievement characterizing modernity; he explains:

The abstract guiding ideas of modern societies provide so little in the way of a universally valid system of reference with which to measure the social worth of particular

traits and abilities that they must always be made concerted through supplemental cultural interpretations before they can be applied to the sphere of recognition. For this reason, the worth accorded to various forms of self-realization and even the manner in which the relevant traits and abilities are defined fundamentally depend on the dominant interpretations of societal goals in each historical case (Honneth, 1996, p. 126).

Eurocentric family values, although affirmed by the dominant specialized worldview, ultimately constitute a partial truth, and according to Patricia Hill Collins, “black women’s experiences as bloodmothers, othermothers, and community othermothers reveal that the mythical norm of a heterosexual, married couple, nuclear family with a nonworking spouse and a husband earning a ‘family wage’ is far from being natural, universal, and preferred but instead is deeply embedded in specific race and class formations” (1990, p. 2). By instituting traditional Eurocentric notions of family and community, child welfare kinship policies run the risk of discrediting and thus disempowering their black female and in other ways marginalized clientele. Collins encourages a paradigm shift that validates the knowledge claims derived from individuals’ lived experiences.

Adopting the framework of Collins’ theory of Black Feminist Thought, S. Yvette Murphy (2008) investigates relationships between African American custodial grandparents and the child welfare institutions that coordinate their placements. Heeding Collins’ call to validate her respondents’ subjugated knowledge claims, she presents African American custodial grandmothers’ perspectives on their partnerships with the child welfare system. She finds that “the grandmothers’ traditional family practices and perspectives were often in conflict with the regulatory guidelines of the child welfare system,” forcing grandmothers to alter their roles, lifestyles, and practices due to involvement in the formalized system (Murphy, 2008, p. 81). Grandmothers were, overall, dissatisfied with the reciprocity of a system that had appealed to their “moral discourse of familial obligation and legacy of caregiving” and benefited from the

partnership, yet failed to adequately support and acknowledge grandparents' public role and contributions (2008, p. 77). From Honneth's perspective, a relationship of mutual recognition failed to materialize, leaving the involved individuals with unmet physical and emotional needs.

Misrecognition of a child's kinship circle can have critical implications for child well-being within Honneth's theoretical framework, which asserts that in order for successful identity formation to occur, the attributes, achievements, and strengths of an individual's community must be seen as legitimate by members of the general collective (Houston & Dolan, 2007, p. 461; Morris, 2012, p. 43). Honneth's notion of solidarity is comparable to Durkheim's mechanical solidarity, requiring a collective orientation toward shared goals and values. American neoliberalism, which, in the wake of moral individualism has weakened society's cultural self-understanding, thus appears implicitly problematic for individuals whose social value depends upon their ability to contribute to the realization of societal goals. From Honneth and Collins' standpoints, the bureaucratization of modern child welfare thus poses a serious threat for modern individuals; however, this model appears to exist in reflexive relationship with social, political, and economic conditions of modernity.

Market-based Discourse of Child Welfare

Murphy's previously discussed findings illuminate the fact that child welfare agencies function not only as moral institutions, but also as social institutions which must survive within a complex web of surrounding social facts (Durkheim, 1972d, p. 117; Murphy, 2008). A third type of discourse surrounding child welfare policy thus emerges: the language of the market, which emphasizes the efficiency and performativity of the child welfare system in the context of

a competitive neoliberal environment. This shift signals a conscious institutionalization of the functionalist stream of thought that underlies this theoretical framework. Yeatman quotes Lyotard, saying, “the application of the criterion of optimizing the system’s performance ‘to all of our games necessarily entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is commensurable) or disappear’” (1991, p. 120).

According to Yeatman, the market-based discourse converts clients into “actual or potential contributors to the performativity of the competition state” (1991, p. 120). Even Durkheim, however, acknowledges that in order for individuals to fulfill their functions in the system of differentiated labor, the evolving institutions must ensure their survival and motivation to participate in social functions (1893/1972a, p. 179). Otherwise, the individual “is no longer a living cell of a living organism which unceasingly interacts with neighboring cells, which influences them, responds to their actions, and transforms itself in relation to changing circumstances and needs. He is no longer anything but an inert cog in the machinery, set in motion by an external force, and always moving in the same direction and in the same way” (1893/1972a, p. 178). The institution, according to both Durkheim and Honneth, must recognize the individual for contributing to the functioning of the larger social organism. Patricia Hill Collins identifies a potential barrier to the delivery of this critical message; she writes, “Black women’s action in the struggle for group survival suggest a vision of community that stands in opposition to that extant in the dominant culture. The definition of community implicit in the market model sees community as arbitrary and fragile, structured fundamentally by competition and domination. In contrast, Afrocentric models of community stress connections, caring, and personal accountability” (Collins, 1990, p. 2). A dominating market-based discourse threatens to

disrespect and disempower these critical contributors to modern child welfare efforts, impacting not only the functionality of the moral institution, but also the family members' daily realities.

Institutions as Systems of Power

Competing discourses and visions of community illuminate the complexity of relationships connecting modern child welfare agencies to children's kinship networks. Within the current neoliberal context, external ways of thinking, behaving, and feeling appear to impose themselves upon all involved individuals, including not only caregivers, but also agency staff, biological families, lawyers, judges, teachers, etc. As Durkheim would anticipate, these social facts take on a coercive and obligatory form, exerting a specific form of power - the power of external constraint - which elicits subordination to the collective laws governing our modern institutions (1924/1972c, p. 73). By encoding particular social and moral facts, child welfare agency policies and practices therefore have the potential not only to ensure the functionality of child welfare institutions, but also to deeply impact modern individuals. They coordinate the child welfare system's functional requirements and corresponding tactics into unique ensembles of discourses, decisions, and justifications that construct real-life experiences, exhibiting characteristics of Foucault's strategic power apparatuses.

The discourses and strategies driving child welfare institutions and their kinship policies emerge as active components of a modern *dispositif*, and, in structuring human existence, they produce a range of intended and unintended functions (Brenner, 1994, p. 680). These consequences include lasting expressions of power, which, as Patricia Hill Collins affirms, can take a variety of forms. They expose modern individuals to both a system of domination and a

platform for empowerment (1990, p. 7). Foucault illuminates a paradox of the previously discussed institutionalization of individual rights that characterizes our modern context. He suggests that the spread of moral individualism exists in a reflexive relationship with hegemonic domination, producing individuals as both subjects and objects within their specific socio-historical contexts.

The implications of these power dynamics for modern social welfare institutions may be profound. As dissenting truth claims, systemic hegemony, and constricting functional needs continue to shape the policies and practices characterizing modern child welfare agencies, kinship caregivers and their families remain vulnerable to the negative repercussions of institutional domination and misrecognition illuminated by the previously discussed theoretical insights of Collins and Honneth; however, Foucault suggests that power, discourses, and institutions can also take on a positive dimension, functioning as tools which individuals can harness to shape the present actuality (Datta, 2008, p. 300).

From Foucault's theoretical perspective, modern child welfare institutions have the capacity to empower the kinship caregivers with whom they partner in their efforts to provide safe, stable, permanent homes for children in out-of-home care. Within our broader discussion, however, a question arises: Can child welfare efforts, embodying the form of Foucault's power apparatuses, function as tools of empowerment while surviving in a modern neo-liberal climate? Foucault suggests that in order to understand the ways institutions shape human experiences, we must stop defining power as a sovereign decision:

Instead, it is a case of studying power at the point where its intention, if it has one, is completely invested in its real and effective practices. What is needed is a study of power in its external visage, at the point where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application, there – that is to say – where it installs itself and produces its real effects. Let us not, therefore, ask why certain people want to dominate, what they seek, what is their overall strategy. Let us ask, instead, how things work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviors etc (Foucault, 1976/2008, p. 97).

We thus embark upon a study of modern institutions by examining the encoded processes that govern the lived experiences of families engaging in formalized kinship care arrangements. The context has been established, and subsequent chapters will adopt this neo-functionalist Foucauldian strategy as the framework underlying the study's methodological approach.

Methodology

The current study employs both quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to investigate the impact of various factors upon the county-based kinship policies implemented by child welfare agencies across the state of Ohio. The research question is the product of a range of dialogues involving social workers, agency administrators, lawyers, legislators, and other participants in Ohio’s child welfare system who have expressed a vested interest in kinship care. Variables under consideration fall into the eight categories included in the table below:

Table 2: List of Variables	
CATEGORY	VARIABLES
Assessment Measures	Local criminal background check, BCII/FBI background check, ICPC interstate check, SACWIS check, home safety audit, financial assessment or monthly budget to assess financial stability, assessment of medical/physical status, assess the needs of the kin/caregiver, other
Reunification and Permanency Planning Efforts	Provision of in-home reunification services, discuss legal custody to kin, discuss guardianship to kin, discuss adoption by relatives, discuss PPLA with relatives, discuss reunification with biological family, other
Cash Assistance and Supportive Services	Referral for KPI, KPI expenditures per 100 children in county, referral for DJFS child-only benefits, Title IV-E foster care payment, redirect child support payment to kin, other cash payments, legal aid, case management services, parent education services, independent living/life skills programs, transitional youth housing services, mental health serves, respite care, child care, home needs (furniture, appliances, etc), clothing allowance, transportation assistance, holiday supportive programs, support groups for caregivers and/or caregiver kids, information and referral, other
Search Process	Time of relative search, search tools
Kinship Worker	Whether or not the agency dedicates a kinship worker
Preferred Custody Arrangement	Agency maintains custody while placing with relatives, agency transfers temporary custody to kin and works case plan with parents, other
Demographics	Total population, percent non-white, percent at or below poverty line

Funding Streams	Participation in ProtectOhio, use of a local levy
Typical Outcome	A child's permanent home until emancipation, a semi-permanent residence until the parents are able to provide a stable environment, other

Treatment of the above-mentioned factors as independent or dependent variables varies over the course of this analysis. The following three subquestions, each addressing a unique combination of variables, incorporate themes derived from informal conversations at Wayne County Children's Services as well as a conference led by the Ohio Grandparent and Kinship Caregiver Coalition in November of 2013:

1) **How do agencies' assessment procedures, permanency planning efforts, and provision of supportive services to kinship caregivers differ depending upon the kinship placement's custody arrangement and licensure status?** In this case, the independent variable is whether kin are licensed as foster parents, kin obtain temporary custody, or kin have legal custody. Dependent variables include assessment practices, permanency planning efforts, and supports available for kinship caregivers in each of the three arrangements.

2) **To what extent do county agencies' staff members and administration generate kinship policy variation from county to county?** Search process, designation of a kinship worker, and agency preference regarding custody arrangement are introduced in this section. In the investigation of interrelated elements of kinship policy, I treat designation of a kinship worker and agency's preferred custody arrangement as independent variables. Dependent variables include assessment procedures, permanency-planning efforts, supports, and "typical outcome" reported by survey respondents.

3) **How do external forces impact county agencies' kinship policies?** Independent variables include county size, percent non-white, percent at or below the poverty level, participation in the ProtectOhio waiver, and the use of a local levy. All of the previously mentioned kinship policy characteristics are considered as dependent variables.

This study begins addressing the three subquestions using quantitative data collection strategies and statistical techniques that treat county agencies as the units of observation. A

survey was distributed to the 88 Ohio county agencies, yielding a sample size of 45 participating counties. This sample represents more than 50% of Ohio's county agencies. In order to measure the sample's generalizability and fill in the gaps in my dataset, I obtained information regarding county demographics, KPI distribution, and agencies' funding streams from various external sources, including PCSAO, ODJFS, the 2010 Census, and the American Community Survey.

Looking at my sample, we see that counties with small population sizes, high percentages of non-white residents, and high percentages of people living below the poverty level are slightly under-represented. Cumulatively, 59% of the state's total population resides in a county that participated in the study. Metropolitan, medium sized, and rural counties are all included. A 5-year American Community Survey completed in 2012 finds that 2% to 35.5% of each county's residents identify as non-white, with a mean of 7.97%, as compared to the 17% of the population statewide. Poverty rates range from 4.4% to 15.2%, with a mean of 7.49% of people living at or below the poverty level, in comparison to the 15.4% statewide. On the other hand, the sample slightly over-represents ProtectOhio counties, as ten (22.2% of the sample) of the eighteen (20.5% of counties statewide) ProtectOhio counties and all six ProtectOhio counties that have implemented the Kinship Strategy are included in this sample of 45 counties. In terms of local levies, the sample is very representative: 51.1% of counties in both the sample and the state passed local children services levies in 2013. Overall, the sample of participating counties appears to be fairly generalizable to the state as a whole.

Development of the survey instrument involved participation of multiple parties. First, I contacted several researchers in search of the most recent version of a state kinship policy survey

conducted by Child Trends in 2001. The survey questions that they provided informed the preliminary draft of the current study's kinship policy survey, which was then edited to incorporate variable kinship policy characteristics identified in the literature review. The executive director of PCSAO (a large membership of Ohio's public child welfare agencies) then agreed to read the draft and proposed a number of revisions to better target Ohio's child welfare system. She also put me in contact with two members of the HSRI team, whose advice regarding collection of kinship policy and outcome data was critical to solidifying this project's research design. Finally, both a social work administrator and kinship caseworker at Wayne County Children Services reviewed the survey and made suggestions for final edits.

The survey was created and distributed using Qualtrics software. Crystal Ward Allen, the executive director of PCSAO, sent an email to the directors of each county agency, providing the link to the Qualtrics survey and encouraging directors to distribute the survey to all departments of their respective agencies. Staff representatives were given three weeks to respond. A copy of the survey and attached cover letter are included in Appendix A. After two weeks, she sent a second email, thanking counties that had already participated and reminding the others of the upcoming deadline. One hundred and forty three staff members completed the survey, representing 45 counties. Survey results were then downloaded using the Qualtrics software.

Of the 45 participating counties, 25 submitted a single survey response while twenty counties were represented by multiple respondents (ranging from 2 to 21 survey responses). In order to conduct statistical tests and identify trends between the county agencies, it was necessary to prepare a dataset that contained only 45 entries, one for each county. At this point, I

needed a system for selecting only one survey response for each agency represented by multiple respondents. Survey responses were prioritized using the following algorithm:

- 1) Respondents who self-identified as kinship workers or kinship program coordinators received first priority under the assumption that they would provide the most accurate kinship policy information. If only one respondent identified as a kinship specialist at a given county, his or her answer was selected.
- 2) For counties with zero or multiple respondents associating with a kinship program or position, a new entry was created calculating the most frequent response for each question on the survey. Then, the answers submitted by each respondent were compared to the modal responses, and by counting up the matching answers, I could identify the entry that best represented an agency's cumulative survey submissions.
- 3) In the case of a tie, I prioritized the response with an earlier submission date/time. This strategy was also used for counties with two responses if neither of them had been submitted by a kinship worker or kinship program staff member. Three selections were made using this final prioritization technique.

While selecting entries for the counties that submitted multiple usable responses, I discovered an unexpected phenomenon in the survey data. It quickly became apparent that answers regarding agencies' kinship policies were far from unanimous; in fact, the responses reflect high intra-county variation. It was therefore critical to investigate the nature of these inconsistencies and to address potential issues of validity and reliability. The small sample size and varying number of responses per county make it impossible to determine the statistical

significance of the variation. I therefore designed a simple test to identify variables that were most affected. For the purpose of this test, I decided to define a county's responses as exhibiting "intra-county variation" if the county reached less than 80% agreement on the given survey question. My test involved the following steps:

- 1) I manually identified each variable for which 80% of the county's respondents answered unanimously. The remaining variables, exhibiting intra-county variation as we have defined it, were then marked.
- 2) It was then possible to add up the number of counties exhibiting intra-county variation for each survey question and thus identify the variables that consistently exhibit variation. A few variables were deemed invalid due to ambiguity of the question and were removed; others, however, with exceptionally high levels of variation (more than 75%, or 15+ counties), did not warrant removal. These high levels of variation affect three variables and may in fact offer interesting insights for our discussion of trends in kinship care.

Intra-county inconsistencies illuminate a limitation to the reliability of the survey results; they also, however, add an unanticipated dimension to our discussion of Ohio kinship policy and reaffirm the importance of supplementary qualitative data. A series of interviews were conducted to contextualize the trends and unravel several puzzles that emerged in the quantitative results. In order to investigate the causes and implications of the intra-county variation, I referenced comment boxes and added interview questions addressing the phenomenon. This variation will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Interviews were conducted with a kinship worker and agency administrator from Wayne County Children Services, as well as a kinship navigator and two kinship program coordinators (one of whom was also a kinship navigator) whose contact information I obtained at a statewide conference surrounding kinship care. One of these staff members then introduced me to his agency's executive director, who subsequently agreed to share her thoughts. A local juvenile court judge also met with me to discuss kinship care from a legal perspective. Five of the seven interviews were conducted in person, while two occurred over the phone. With consent of participants, six of the seven interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed. The study is compliant with US Department of Health and Human Services Code of Federal Regulations and has been deemed to be of minimal risk for human participants. Appendix B contains sample interview questions, which followed a semi-standardized format. The primary goal was to gather insights into the causes and implications of both intra- and inter-county variation; furthermore, the questions addressed agency philosophies toward kinship care and elicited suggestions for kinship programs throughout the rest of the state.

In the following chapter, I present a discussion of my findings, organized in three sections to answer the three components of my research question. Statistical tests, qualitative contributions, and findings from the literature review all play a role in telling the multi-dimensional story of agency policies and county characteristics impacting kinship caregivers across the state of Ohio.

Results and Discussion

(1) How do agencies' assessment procedures, permanency planning efforts, and provision of supportive services to kinship caregivers differ depending upon a kinship caregiver's legal and licensure status?

Before we can investigate the ways in which treatment of kinship caregivers differs from county to county across Ohio, it is critical to understand the diversity of circumstances that may unfold within a child welfare agency as a result of a caregiver's legal relationship with the child and respective agency. This section therefore seeks to capture the variation caused by this case-specific variable – a kinship placement's custody arrangement and licensure status – in order to better understand the levels of support and supervision allocated to kinship caregivers. To address this research question, I selected a subsample of counties that identified at least one way of assessing or supporting caregivers in each of the following three arrangements: kin caring for children in the agency's custody and licensed as foster parents, kin with temporary custody, or kin with legal custody. Eight counties were removed from the sample because they answered zero questions regarding at least one type of kinship caregiver, leaving us with 36 agencies. The question will be addressed in three parts, investigating how (A) assessment measures, (B) reunification and permanency planning efforts, and (C) provision of supportive services differ depending upon the custody arrangement of the kinship placement.

Assessment Procedures

The survey asked agency representatives to indicate which of the following checks comprise the assessment of a relative's ability to care: a local criminal background check, BCII/FBI

federal background check, ICPC interstate check, SACWIS (Ohio's child welfare information system) check, Home Safety Audit, Financial Assessment or Monthly Budget to assess financial stability, assessment of medical/physical status, or other. More than half of the counties with multiple survey responses answered consistently (at least 80% agreement) regarding three of the assessment measures: local criminal background check, SACWIS check, and Home Safety Audit. These are also the most prevalent ways of assessing kinship caregivers' ability to care, with at least 32 of the 36 counties reporting use of these for kin in all three custody arrangements.

For the remaining measures, responses exhibit more intra-county variation, especially regarding kinship caregivers in legal custody arrangements. Representatives from the same agency appear to have varying notions of whether caseworkers are instructed to conduct checks such as a financial assessment, especially if the caregiver is granted legal custody. Although results surrounding these four variables appear to be limited in their reliability, analysis of the 36 selected responses suggests that agencies are less likely to use these assessment measures for kin with legal custody than they are for kin in the other custody arrangements. For example, 23 counties require caseworkers to assess financial stability of kin legal custodians as opposed to the 26 counties requiring this for relatives with temporary custody and 28 counties for kin licensed as foster parents. Agencies consistently exhibit the highest likelihood of requiring the assessment measures for kinship foster parents.

These findings may relate, in part, to the mandated procedures for assessing kin in county custody, as outlined in 5101:2-42-18 of Ohio's Revised Code. Prior to placing the child with a

relative substitute caregiver, the statute requires agencies to complete a number of approval requirements, noted in Table 3. Then, if they fulfill the eligibility criteria, kin can go through a series of steps (including 36 hours of pre-service training) to be licensed as foster parents.

Streamlined assessment criteria do not exist for relatives agreeing to accept custody of the child either temporarily or permanently. If kin legal custodians choose to apply for KPI benefits, however, they would also have to undergo a criminal background check, home and safety check, income eligibility check, and assessment of child's needs and caregivers' ability to provide for those needs.

Table 3: Approval requirements for kin caring for children in agency custody:

- Gather identifying information about all residents in the home
- Assure that SACWIS checks have been completed for all house residents
- Conduct a home study (to assess cleanliness, safety conditions, sufficient facilities, provision of home needs, etc)
- Provide information regarding accessibility of support services for the child, tell the relative how to apply for OWF financial assistance and foster caregiver certification (and explain differences in payments and eligibility criteria)
- Assess their ability and willingness to care
- Submit fingerprints for a FBI/BCII federal background check

A comment from a survey respondent reveals one potential explanation for the disparity in assessment criteria required for kin with temporary and legal custody. The respondent wrote that his or her agency only requests legal custody post temporary custody, so the checks required for temporary custody would have already been completed by the time legal custody is pursued. If temporary custody is generally treated as the initial custodial arrangement, it makes sense that assessment criteria would be more rigid. At the point of transferring permanent legal custody,

perhaps agencies are already fairly familiar with the relatives and comfortable with the placement.

The survey also asked county representatives to indicate whether or not caseworkers are instructed to assess the kinship caregivers' needs. Based on the selected responses, at least 33 of the 36 counties conduct a needs assessment for kinship caregivers in all three custodial arrangements. Once again, I found more counties exhibiting intra-county variation in the survey responses pertaining to kin with legal custody than for the other two arrangements.

Reunification and Permanency Planning Efforts

Several survey questions were included to examine the reunification and permanency planning efforts that apply to kin in the three custody types. Results exhibit clear distinctions between the three arrangements. One survey question asked whether or not caseworkers are instructed to provide in-home reunification services to the child's birth parents in cases where kin are licensed as foster caregivers, kin have temporary custody, and kin have legal custody. Of the 36 counties comprising the subsample, 33 indicated that reunification services are offered to families with kin foster arrangements, 31 said the same for kin temporary custodians, and only 12 indicated that the child's birthparents receive reunification services if kin have legal custody. It is also interesting to note that for this question, staff members submitting multiple responses from a given agency were more consistent in their responses regarding legal custodians than they were for kin foster parents and temporary custodians. This is the opposite of what we saw for the assessment measures.

An interview with the judge of Wayne County’s local juvenile and probate courts helps clarify how these three custodial arrangements relate to reunification efforts and formalization of permanency for children in kinship care. Her insights introduce a critical factor driving reunification efforts – the stage at which permanency is established. Judge Wiles explained that in Wayne County, the initial custody arrangement following a removal will typically involve the transfer of temporary custody to either the agency or relatives (in which case the agency would temporarily supervise the case) so that the birth parents have the opportunity to attempt reunification. A transfer of temporary custody to the agency gives relatives the option of being licensed as foster parents; transfer of custody to the relatives, on the other hand, generally begins with relatives holding temporary custody. Although some agencies claim to make this decision on a case-by-case basis, many express a general preference for one temporary custodial arrangement over the others. The impact of these philosophical differences will be addressed in the following section.

Because legal custody is a permanent arrangement, this option is often pursued only after relatives have held temporary custody and reunification efforts have proven unsuccessful. Interviews reveal that it is also possible, however, for courts to transfer legal custody immediately, without initial placement under the agency’s supervision. Judge Wiles explains that if a child services agency is involved, this type of arrangement would be unlikely to occur (in Wayne County) unless “you have some reason to know that reunification is never going to happen. Parents don’t want it to happen, are ok with giving legal custody to the relative.” Although other judges and agencies may be bypassing reunification efforts to pursue legal

custody, the survey responses and interviews generally reflect a commitment to reunification efforts preceding a permanent out-of-home placement.

As noted in the literature review, legal custody is not the only custodial arrangement available for relatives who agree to permanently care for children removed from their homes. The survey therefore also asked agency representatives to identify other permanency options discussed with relatives in all three arrangements. Survey results surrounding permanency planning for kin foster parents and kin with temporary custody exhibit interesting trends. For both arrangements, agencies are most likely to discuss legal custody (100% of the 36 counties for kin foster parents, 94% for kin temporary custodians), followed by legal guardianship (81% for foster parents, 75% for temporary custodians), then adoption by relatives (78% for foster parents, 67% for temporary custodians), and finally, PPLA with relatives (47% for foster parents, 36% for temporary custodians).

Most of these variables exhibit intra-agency variation (less than 80% agreement) for more than half of the counties submitting multiple responses, with an especially high level of variation for discussion of legal guardianship with kin foster parents. There were several notable exceptions: same-county responses were fairly consistent regarding discussion of legal custody with kin foster parents, as were the answers regarding discussion of the PPLA option with kin in both custody arrangements.

The results suggest that legal custody is the most likely permanency option to be discussed with kinship caregivers across the sample of agencies, regardless of the caregiver's initial temporary custody arrangement. This is interesting, given the findings of Jantz et al's state

kinship policy survey (2001), for which Ohio claimed to file for the termination of parental rights for every kinship case. This finding might imply that in 2001, Ohio was more likely to pursue adoption by kinship caregivers. My survey results, however, exhibit a shift towards the transfer of legal custody, perhaps shedding light upon a recent development in kinship practice across the state's child welfare system. In order to draw firmer conclusions surrounding typical custody arrangements for kinship placements, additional data is necessary; unfortunately, aggregate custody arrangement and outcome data are unavailable for this study.

Interviews and survey comments highlight a range of factors that influence decisions to pursue the custody arrangements and permanency options discussed in this section. For example, staff members assert that legal custody can empower relatives, is non-intrusive, and allows caregivers to “sign the releases and do all those things that a custodial person ought to be able to do.” Legal custody also allows the birthparents to maintain residual rights and requires continued visitation, supervised by the relatives. On the other hand, one kinship worker explains, “some relatives, though, would prefer to not have any ties with the parents at all - to go through adoption.” Adoption involves permanently terminating parental rights, which can cause tension between family members but may be appropriate when relationships between kinship caregivers and the birth parents are volatile. These custody options also correspond to varying levels of support and supervision, a factor that warrants further investigation.

Provision of Supportive Services

Next, the survey asked about the services and supports available to relative caregivers in the three custody arrangements. The lists of supports included four forms of financial assistance

(referral for KPI, referral for DJFS child-only benefits, Title IV-E foster care payments, and redirect child support payment to kin/relative), as well as thirteen additional supports, included in Table 4. Respondents were also given the opportunity to specify other cash payments or other supportive services. Results provide interesting insights into the ways in which kin in the three custody arrangements are supported across the subsample of 36 agencies.

The four forms of financial support offer varying levels of assistance and have specific eligibility requirements, which are important to understand before I discuss the respondents' answers to this question. The DJFS child-only payments are available for any kinship caregivers

Table 4: Additional Supportive Services:

- Legal aid
- Case management services
- Parent education services
- Independent living/life skills programs, transitional youth housing services
- Mental Health Services
- Respite care
- Child Care
- Home needs
- Clothing allowance
- Transportation assistance
- Holiday supportive programs
- Support groups for caregivers and/or caregiver kids
- Information and referral

who are related to the child by blood or marriage or hold legal custody or guardianship, so these payments (\$268 a month plus approximately \$93 for each additional sibling) are accessible to most relative caregivers (“Ohio’s Continuum of Care: Kinship, Foster and Adoptive Families,” 2012). Services for redirecting child support should be available for any full-time caregivers, depending on the needs of the child and parents’ ability to pay (“Ohio Resource Guide for Relatives Caring for Children,” 2012). Of the four financial supports, Title IV-E foster care payments are by far the most generous (\$600 per month average reimbursement, higher for therapeutic or medically fragile children) but only licensed kinship foster parents can satisfy the

eligibility requirements. KPI payments (\$450 initially, then \$250 every six months for up to three years), on the other hand, are available only for kin with legal custody who have been approved by an agency and whose gross family income does not exceed 300% of the poverty level (“Ohio’s Continuum of Care: Kinship, Foster and Adoptive Families,” 2012).

As expected, respondents report that referrals for DJFS child-only benefits are offered to kin in all three arrangements (for kin foster parents at 28 counties, for temporary custodians at 33 counties, and for legal custodians at 31 counties). Interestingly, however, agencies appear to be much more likely to redirect child support payments to kin with legal custody (28 agencies) and temporary custody (27 agencies) than they are for kin foster parents (14 agencies). This finding is surprising, given Judge Wiles’ assertion that child support should be redirected to relatives, either directly or through the agency, regardless of their legal title.

KPI funds and Title IV-E foster care payments have stricter eligibility requirements, yet the survey yielded varying responses. As expected, kin with legal custody are most likely to be referred for KPI (33 counties) and kin foster parents are the most likely to be referred for Title IV-E foster care payments (20 counties); however, several counties reported referring kin temporary custodians (4 agencies) and kin legal custodians (4 agencies) for Title IV-E foster care payments, and some claim to refer kin foster parents (5 counties) and kin temporary custodians (10 counties) for KPI payments for which they would not be eligible. Several respondents identified other types of cash assistance available at their county agencies, including special kinship funds, periodic purchase orders or reimbursements for specific needs, information regarding social security, and local Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC) funds.

Overall, responses exhibit high intra-county variation, especially regarding kin foster parents' access to Title IV-E foster care payments and temporary custodian's ability to receive KPI payments. These results raise questions of reliability and suggest that not all employees understand the eligibility requirements of cash benefits available to kinship caregivers. This may be inconsequential if the people filling out the survey are not responsible for making referrals. The implications could be serious, however, if staff members directly serving kinship caregivers are unfamiliar with available financial supports.

Agencies also provide varying degrees of additional supportive services for kinship caregivers. In order to compare the overall level of support offered to kin in the three custody arrangements, I created three new variables, representing the total number of additional supportive services for each of the three custody arrangements. This allowed me to compute the average number of in-house services available for caregivers in each of the three arrangements for the 36 counties in our subsample. I found that, on average, ten supportive services (excluding cash assistance) are available to foster kin caregivers, nine are available for kin with temporary custody, and six are available for kin with legal custody. A series of confidence intervals, conducted to measure the generalizeability of this finding, indicate that the average child welfare agency in Ohio has a 95% chance of offering kin foster parents somewhere between 9 and 11 supportive services, kin with temporary custody 8 to 10 supportive services, and kin with legal custody 5 to 7 supportive services, of the 14 included in the survey.

The findings are statistically significant, allowing us to predict with 95% certainty that an agency will offer fewer supportive services to kin with legal custody than to kin in the other two

custodial arrangements. One agency administrator says that finding is to be expected, because “typically if we do a legal custody transfer, most likely the case will end. And that’s the same in most counties. If that parent is to say, we have no concerns, we can just close the case out. So there would be no case management services.” In a study investigating five states’ kinship policies, Hornby et al also find that kin caring for children who are diverted from the system generally receive lower levels of support and supervision than those caring for children who are formally involved with a child welfare agency (1996, p. 416). Recall that in cases involving kin foster care and temporary custody to relatives, agencies are legally responsible to actively supervise care of the child, whereas when legal custody is awarded to relatives, legal responsibility officially and permanently shifts to the kinship caregivers.

It therefore comes as no surprise that agencies tend to prioritize cases involving children in their custody or under their protective supervision. It is also important to note, however, that we are only comparing the sum number of services available to kin – and not the monetary or qualitative value of available supports, the degree to which they are actually distributed and used, or the quality of information and referrals. Furthermore, the test ignores the intra-county variation that we have observed for county agencies submitting multiple responses.

This section of the survey also yielded a pronounced level of intra-county variation. For all three custody arrangements, and especially for kin foster parents and legal custodians, counties with multiple responses were, for the most part, unable to reach 80% agreement regarding provision of the specific supportive services. The most extreme example pertains to availability of an independent living/life skills program. Less than four of the nineteen counties were able to

reach 80% agreement regarding availability of this service for kinship foster families and caregivers with temporary custody. Perhaps this question was confusing, as it alludes to a service intended for the youth in care, and not necessarily the caregivers themselves. The variation in responses raises concerns not only about the reliability of findings surrounding provision of supportive services, but also regarding whether or not caregivers are being informed about the available supports.

Interviewed staff members suggest that the inconsistencies might relate to frequent changes in the actual availability of supports, as well as to staff members' levels of awareness regarding services for kinship caregivers. One worker explains, "I'm happy that we now have an emphasis on the kinship placement. That to me is a plus. I would say, knowledge of the services that are available after placement have always been hit or miss depending on the knowledge of that caseworker." Almost every interviewee emphasized the importance of educating caseworkers about various dimensions of kinship care, a theme that will be further discussed in a later section.

Although reliability of the selected survey responses is questionable, several interesting trends do emerge, warranting further investigation. Responses indicate that information and referral are available to kin of all three custody arrangements at most county agencies. Higher disparities emerge regarding availability of the other services. Take, for example, the most prevalent services for kinship foster parents, besides information and referral: case management services (35 agencies), transportation assistance (31 agencies), mental health services (30 agencies), and clothing allowance (30 agencies). We find that case management services are also readily available for kin with temporary custody (34 counties), but less so for kin with legal

custody (18 counties). A comparable trend emerges regarding mental health services (30 counties for temporary custodians, 23 counties for legal custodians). Transportation assistance and clothing allowance, on the other hand, are offered to temporary custodians much less frequently than for kinship foster parents (23 offer transportation allowance for temporary custodians, 15 counties offer clothing allowance), and an even smaller number of counties offer these services for legal custodians (11 offer transportation allowance, 9 offer clothing allowance).

Although, for the most part, kin foster parents are offered the most supportive services, it is interesting to note that temporary custodians are equally likely to be offered mental health and parent education services and are more likely than kin foster parents to be offered legal aid, home needs, and access to a support group. With the exception of information and referral, all supportive services included in this survey are offered to legal custodians at fewer agencies than they are to kin in the other two arrangements.

This section provided an overview of the general trends in assessment procedures, permanency planning, and provision of supportive services allotted to kin foster parents, kin temporary custodians, and kin with legal custody across our subsample of 36 counties. It has not, however, fully investigated the factors driving variation from county to county. The literature suggests that Ohio's state policy is unique in leaving the level of supervision and support available for kinship caregivers to the discretion of county agencies; in fact, Jantz et al found that in 2001, Ohio was one of only two states nation-wide that did not require agencies to provide the same supports and services to kin foster parents as non-kin (Jantz et al, 2002, pp. 12-

13). The next section therefore addresses differences across Ohio counties, attempting to isolate the internal factors that may be explaining procedural differences and varying levels of support and supervision available for kinship caregivers.

(2) To what extent do agency staff and administration generate kinship policy variation from county to county?

This second research question introduces several new characteristics that distinguish county agencies' varying kinship policies and procedures. In addition to the previously discussed factors pertaining to assessment, permanency planning, and provision of supportive services, the survey asked about search protocol, designation of a kinship worker, and agency preference regarding custody arrangement. Entries selected for all 45 participating counties are included in this analysis. I begin by defining the policy characteristics under investigation and considering their frequency distributions across the sample of county agencies. After explaining how agencies may differ in terms of these three new variables, I investigate relationships between various elements of kinship policy in order to examine how decisions made within children service agencies could potentially impact the counties' kinship families.

Search Process

Survey respondents were asked to identify the point at which caseworkers are instructed to seek out relatives to care for a child, and results yielded very little variation. Almost all counties indicated that they search for relatives at or prior to removal. Malm and Bess, who also find a consistent emphasis on early identification of relatives, attribute this trend to ASFA's push

for timely permanency (2003, p. 60). In fact, Ohio law mandates that within thirty days of removing a child from his or her home, an agency must “exercise due diligence in identifying maternal and paternal grandparents and other adult relatives of the child, including any adult relatives suggested by the child’s parents” (5101:2-39-01). Maternal and paternal grandparents as well as other adult relatives must also be notified that the child has been removed so that they have the option to participate in the child’s care and placement. According to the survey responses, agencies are complying with the mandate. Qualitative data, however, suggests that this can play out in a variety of ways.

Survey respondents’ comments describing available search tools and interviewee insights about search and placement protocol illuminate interesting patterns across county agencies. Almost all agencies report that caseworkers first talk to the parents and children to identify potential kinship placements. Neighbors, other relatives, schools, and churches are also often contacted. To document leads regarding potential relative placements, a number of agencies claim to keep “relative search forms” on file, and one uses a specific document called FESIC, which is filled out by caseworkers and families and then processed by agency staff. Checking SACWIS for people who have been supports in the past emerges as another common technique, as well as checking public records, conducting Internet searches (sometimes using social media), and looking through old case notes. Some agencies have chosen to purchase search tools (such as Accurint, a database used to identify additional relatives). Others conduct family meetings, record family trees, use genogram softwares, or make ecomaps with the child or family. A few counties even dedicate workers or departments to search and engagement (including four that

have federally funded Kinship Navigators), and several collaborate with law enforcement for completion of background checks.

Although the comments create a sense that most agencies are actively searching for relatives, several interviewed staff members emphasize that “looking for relatives” may play out differently not only across agencies, but even from worker to worker. An agency administrator comments upon varying approaches to relative search, explaining,

But checking with a relative can be this, Andreja, it can be, “Are you interested in the kid? He’s got a lot of problems. Ok thanks.” Or, “I would really like to sit down with you and talk to you about the strengths of this kid and some of the challenges that we have” as opposed to just checking it off your list, you know? So, that’s my distinction. Do I have this worker that’s going to check it off the list or do I have this worker that’s going to meet with the family and try to make it happen?

Furthermore, the interviews reveal that while some agencies have the resources and staff buy-in to engage in proactive family finding and “scour the universe” searching for relatives, others merely fulfill the mandate. They might begin searching for relatives within the first month of removal, for example, and place children in a licensed foster home until an appropriate kinship caregiver is identified and assessed. Malm and Bess attribute these types of delays to licensing requirements, availability of relatives, and supervisors’ preferences for non-relative placements (2003, p. 58). Interviewed staff members add that when workers find themselves overwhelmed with busy caseloads and mandated responsibilities, “it’s so much easier sometimes to go with the philosophy that, you know what, I’m just going to put this kid in foster care, because I know that this is a licensed foster home, that way I know that this kid is safe for the

night and I can go on to something else.” Decisions made not only by agency administrators, but also individual caseworkers appear to impact an agency’s investment in relative search.

Designation of Kinship Worker

As for the designation of a kinship worker, answers from counties submitting multiple responses were fairly consistent, and we do see some variation across the state. Of the 45 agencies, nineteen (42%) indicated that they have at least one staff member dedicated to kinship care, whereas 26 agencies (58%) did not. The interviews provide a sense of how these workers might be serving kinship families. I spoke with staff members in various types of kinship-specific positions, including coordinators of kinship units, an external kinship navigator (working at the department on aging), a kinship navigator working at a CSB agency, and a kinship caseworker. Their responsibilities appear to vary considerably, ranging from conducting home studies for relative placements and attending kinship families’ court hearings, to building connections with local service providers, providing ongoing services to kinship caregivers, and training agency workers to prioritize family search and engagement efforts at the intake level. Interviewed workers and administrators both emphasized the role of these key actors in shaping an agency’s culture towards one that prioritizes kinship care.

Preferred Custodial Arrangement

My discussions with social workers have illuminated another internal factor that may be acting as a driving force in kinship policy – county agencies’ philosophies regarding appropriate custodial arrangements for kinship caregivers. The survey asked respondents to identify the

custody arrangement that their agency was most likely to pursue: (a) the agency maintaining custody while placing the child with relatives, (b) transferring temporary custody to kin/relatives and continuing to work on case plan objectives with parents, (c) transferring legal custody to relative/kin and closing the case, or (d) other. Of the 45 county representatives, 12 (27%) selected the first option, 19 (42%) selected the second option, and 14 (31%) chose “other.” No agencies selected the third option, although comments in the text boxes suggested that it was not uncommon for agencies selecting (b) or (d) to actively pursue legal custody during various stages of a case.

The variable was thus recoded into three categories: (a) prefer to maintain custody when placing with relatives, (b) prefer to transfer custody while working on a case plan with biological parents, and (c) none of the above, which generally meant that all three custody arrangements were treated as viable options or the agency preferred placing with relatives without getting court involvement (working voluntary cases with a safety plan). After reading the explanations provided by respondents, I moved some counties into what seemed to be the most appropriate category. Ultimately, 11 counties comprised the first group, 19 fell into the second, and 15 were in the third. This distribution suggests that the largest number of counties prefers to transfer temporary custody to relatives while continuing to provide reunification services to the child’s birth parents.

Our categories loosely correspond to the distinctions identified in Hornby et al’s investigation of five states’ kinship procedures (1996). Hornby et al identify two general ways in which agencies might choose to arrange kinship placements: firstly, agencies may place children

with relatives and transfer legal custody to divert from formal placement; secondly, the child may be placed in a kin foster home temporarily, while reunification efforts continue and permanency planning options are discussed. Their study, however, ignores the possibility of transferring temporary custody to relatives and continuing reunification services, a practice that appears to be prevalent across Ohio counties.

Hornby et al find that the ways agencies choose to use kinship care correspond to varying levels of support and supervision for caregivers and their families (1996, p. 402, 416). The following subsection investigates such trends. It is important to note, however, that these agencies do not have complete control over the custody arrangements of their kinship families. Ultimately, a motion must be requested by the agency, filed by a prosecuting attorney, and granted by a juvenile court judge before the agency or caregiver receives custody of a child who has been removed from home due to allegations of abuse or neglect. Interviewed staff members therefore consistently identify local prosecutors and juvenile courts as critical forces determining kinship practice. One staff member explains, “You’re basically at the beck and call of your county. And what I mean by that is how kids are placed with you, that’s dependent on the juvenile court system. Some juvenile court systems are much more open to placing with relatives and other juvenile court systems, absolutely not.” Comment boxes identify several cases in which kinship policies depend upon these court preferences. For example, one county’s representative writes that, “We are working with our court to give custody to the relatives while maintaining a PSO (protective supervision order). Our court has been hesitant to do that.” Another county, on the other hand, indicates that the local “courts want the agency to give

relatives custody sooner instead of the agency keeping custody.” The policy implications of these legal decisions will be further addressed in the following section.

Interrelated Policy Characteristics

Thus far, a number of factors have been discussed as independent variables comprising agencies’ kinship policies and procedures. In practice, however, these policy characteristics might be tightly interconnected. By investigating their relationships, this section examines the significance of several elements of kinship policy. I am particularly interested in the impact of dedicating a kinship worker and expressing a preference for one potential custody arrangement over the others upon the provision of support and supervision to a county’s kinship caregivers.

In order to test the relationships between designation of a kinship worker and other policy characteristics discussed so far, I ran a series of T-tests and crosstabs. No statistically significant relationships emerged regarding assessment measures or permanency planning efforts; however, dedication of a kinship worker does appear to impact distribution of KPI funds and provision of additional supportive services for kinship caregivers.

Based on the KPI data provided by ODJFS staff, I found that counties whose agencies dedicate at least one worker to kinship care have higher KPI expenditures per 100 children than counties without dedicated kinship workers. The difference is statistically significant, with counties employing kinship workers spending an average of \$131.76 per hundred children living in the county, as opposed to the average of \$78.44 spent for every hundred children in counties without kinship workers ($t = -2.266$, $p = 0.029$). This trend illuminates several potential

implications of dedicating a kinship worker. These counties could simply have more kinship placements, resulting in a greater number of eligible caregivers. It is also possible that agencies with kinship workers are more aware of the available benefits for kinship caregivers and are better able to ensure that eligible kin receive them. We cannot test these hypotheses, however, given the data available for this study.

The presence of a kinship worker also relates to provision of additional supportive services, especially to kin foster parents. T-tests were conducted in order to identify statistically significant differences between the sum number of supportive services offered by agencies with and without kinship workers. Results indicate that agencies with kinship workers offer an average of 10.05 supportive services (excluding cash assistance) to kinship foster parents, as opposed to the average of 7.38 services offered by the other agencies, a statistically significant difference ($t = -2.224$, $p = 0.031$). Dedication of a worker also corresponds to slight increases in provision of supportive services offered to kin with temporary custody or legal custody; however, these differences are not statistically significant.

We already know, from the previous section, that agencies tend to offer kinship foster parents more supportive services than they do to kin temporary custodians or kin legal custodians; however, these new findings regarding the impact of designating a worker add a new dimension to our discussion. Several questions emerged as I began to examine causality; for example, are agencies with designated kinship workers offering more supports because they have the staff available to expand the existing array of services available to kinship caregivers? Or are agencies that have the resources to provide additional supportive services also able to designate

kinship workers? The effects of county demographics and funding sources will be examined in the following section to begin to unravel the answers to these questions.

Interviews illuminate several ways in which one or more kinship workers can increase the availability of services for kinship caregivers. In addition to engaging in relative search and providing case management services, they might attend court hearings, participate in family team meetings, facilitate support groups, plan events, establish relationships with local providers, and create new supportive services targeting the relatives' needs. Furthermore, the coordinator of a kinship unit emphasized in an interview that a large benefit of the dedicated workers is that if other caseworkers "don't feel that they know where all of the supports are, they're getting hooked up with somebody in the kinship unit so that in and of itself takes care to make sure that those kinship caregivers' needs are met."

Both the survey results and interviews thus illustrate a positive relationship between dedication of a kinship worker and provision of supportive services for kinship caregivers. It remains unclear, however, why these workers make a more statistically significant impact upon provision of supports for kin in foster care than they do for kin with temporary or legal custody. Perhaps another variable plays a role in the level of support provided by agencies for caregivers of the three legal statuses. Interviews illuminate a second policy characteristic that can act as a driving force for an agency's kinship care procedures: a preference for pursuing one custodial arrangement over the others.

On average, survey results suggest that agencies that prefer to maintain custody offer more services to kin foster parents (9.18 supports) and fewer to temporary and legal custodians

(6.91 for temporary custodians, 3.00 for legal custodians) than those typically transferring custody to kin (6.47 for kin foster parents, 8.89 for temporary custodians, and 6.47 for legal custodians). Agencies expressing no preference, on the other hand, offer relatively high levels of support for all three, with an average of 10.60 supports to kin foster parents, 8.87 supports to kin with temporary custody, and 5.93 supports for legal custodians. Three ANOVA tests (one for each of the three types of kinship caregivers) were conducted to determine whether these differences are statistically significant. Results indicate that the three custody preference groups only provide significantly different numbers of supports for kinship foster parents ($F = 5.156$, $p = 0.01$). Post hoc tests reveal that there is an especially pronounced difference between agencies that generally transfer custody and those that express no preference.

Taking the “no preference” category out of the equation, I then ran a series of T-tests comparing the eleven agencies that tend to maintain custody to the nineteen that prefer to transfer custody and found that the differences in provision of supportive services to kin foster parents and temporary custodians are not statistically significant; however, results allow me to assert with at least 95% confidence that legal custodians are likely to be offered more supportive services at agencies that prefer transferring custody to relatives than at agencies that typically hold custody ($t = -2.424$, $p = 0.022$). Overall, these trends suggest that the agencies in my sample tend to prioritize certain legal and licensure statuses for kinship caregivers, and they allocate resources to support relatives in those preferred arrangements.

In fact, survey responses illuminate that some agencies may only be serving kinship caregivers of one or two of the three possible arrangements. Multiple survey respondents

identified zero supportive services for at least one type of kinship caregiver. Six counties (with varying custody arrangement preferences) provide no additional supportive services to legal custodians, and three of these also report nothing for temporary custodians. Seven counties offer nothing for kin foster parents, all of which also indicate that custody is typically transferred to the relative. Although respondents may have left the question blank by accident, these findings shed light upon the possibility that some agencies do not support all three types of kinship caregivers, perhaps because they have no open cases with kin of certain legal and licensure statuses.

This finding may have important implications for kinship foster parents, given the federal mandate requiring agencies to offer relatives the option to be licensed as foster care providers. It is possible that the six agencies do in fact offer relatives the option to be licensed, but no caregivers are actively pursuing this type of arrangement. The coordinator of a kinship navigator unit mentions that in his county, kin have the option to be licensed as foster caregivers but “what I’ve found is that a lot of them don’t want to be involved in the system,” so custody is typically transferred to relatives. On the other hand, Templeman’s study finds that local agencies can express varying levels of willingness to take custody of children placed with kin, and family court judges will occasionally place children with unlicensed kin, regardless state requirements (2003, p. 90).

By choosing not to promote kinship foster care as a viable alternative, certain courts and child welfare agencies may be seriously affecting their caregivers’ financial and legal situations. Unless these counties are able to provide another form of cash assistance for their kinship

families, the caregivers' options for financial assistance would be limited to KPI funds and OWF child-only grants, as opposed to the significantly more generous foster parent stipend.

Furthermore, if custody is transferred directly to relatives, kinship families may find it difficult to pursue adoption upon the expiration of a temporary custody order.

Analysis thus far has found both the presence of a worker and an agency's preferred custody arrangement to notably impact the provision of supportive services to kinship caregivers, especially kin foster parents and legal custodians. The statistical tests have considered these two variables independently; however, it is possible that the presence of a worker and a preference for a certain custody arrangement are in fact closely interrelated. A chi-square analysis indicates that these two variables do in fact exhibit a statistically significant relationship (chi square statistic = 6.118, $p = .047$). According to the crosstab, counties with designated kinship workers are the most likely to fall into the "no preference" category (9 counties, 47.4%), whereas the agencies without kinship workers tend to prefer transferring legal custody (15 counties, 57.5%).

Because these two variables are statistically related, it is difficult to determine which has a more significant impact upon provision of supportive services to kinship foster parents. Deeper investigation of the agencies characterized by these six unique combinations illuminates several interesting patterns. Looking more closely at the fifteen counties that prefer transferring custody but do not have kinship workers, I find six of the previously mentioned county agencies that submitted an entirely blank column for the survey question asking about supportive services available for kinship foster parents. Because these six unusual counties comprise such a large part of the group (40%), it seems reasonable to infer that their responses, to a large extent,

explain why a preference for transferring custody and absence of a kinship worker have been shown to correspond to fewer supports for kin foster parents.

In fact, when the thirteen counties that only provide supportive services for one or two types of kinship caregivers are removed from the sample, all statistically significant results disappear. In part, this is probably a result of the decreased sample size. It also, however, appears as though the preference for transferring custody to relatives no longer correlates with a decrease in supportive services for kinship foster parents. Agencies with workers still appear to offer slightly more support to kin foster parents (average of 10.75 supports) than agencies without kinship workers (9.82 supports), but the difference is much less pronounced than in the original sample. Legal custodians, on the other hand, are still offered a noticeably higher number of supportive services by agencies that generally transfer custody (average of 7.55 services) than agencies that prefer maintaining custody (4.71 services), although this difference is no longer statistically significant.

The smallest of our six groups, the four agencies that prefer transferring custody and have a designated kinship worker, also proves interesting. We find that for these four counties, the average numbers of supportive services offered to kin foster parents (8.5 services), temporary custodians (9.5 services), and legal custodians (9 services) exceed the respective averages at counties that prefer transferring custody but have no dedicated worker. These levels of support for kin with legal and temporary custody are also notably higher than the entire sample's averages, suggesting that these counties have been able to allocate resources to serve relatives holding temporary or legal custody of kin children. This finding is not reflected in statistical

tests because it affects such a small percentage of county agencies. In fact, the phenomenon appears to be unusual not only across our sample of surveyed agencies, but also throughout the literature. Hornby et al find that policies promoting the transfer of custody, which he calls diversion policies, tend to involve low levels of support or supervision, and in general, research indicates that caregivers holding custody are often the least supported (“Extended Families Hero Children Avoid Foster Care,” 2009, p.1). In these four counties, however, they do not appear to be.

Unfortunately, kinship placement outcome data is not available for this study, limiting my ability to investigate implications of these various policy characteristics upon children in kinship care. The survey therefore included a question asking respondents to identify a typical outcome for kinship cases at their respective agencies. The options were: (a) the child’s permanent home until emancipation, (b) a semi-permanent residence until the parents are able to provide a stable environment, (c) a semi-permanent residence at risk of disruption due to child behavior, lack of supports, repeat maltreatment, etc, (d) a temporary placement until a temporary court order expires, or (e) none of the above. Twelve counties (26.7%) selected the first option, 31 (68.9%) selected the second, one (2.2%) selected the third, and one (2.2%) chose “none of the above.” To conduct statistical tests, I dropped the two responses that answered (c) and (e), keeping the 43 counties that selected either the first or second option.

I conducted two chi square analyses in order to see whether or not the “typical outcome” variable exhibited a statistically significant relationship with either the dedication of a kinship worker or an agency’s preferred custody arrangement. The results are surprising, although they

confirm a trend emerging throughout this subsection. I found that a preference for one custody arrangement over the other does not relate to the respondent's perceived typical outcome.

Dedication of a worker, on the other hand, does. Respondents representing agencies with kinship workers are significantly more likely to select the second outcome choice, (b) a semi-permanent residence until the parents are able to provide a stable environment, than respondents from agencies without workers designated for kinship care (chi square statistic = 4.341, $p=0.037$).

Results consistently point to the dedication of a kinship worker as a critical factor shaping the ways in which agencies work with kinship caregivers. Both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that kinship workers not only increase the numbers of supportive services available for kinship foster parents, but they also present opportunities for agencies preferring to transfer custody to expand available supports to kin in temporary and legal custody arrangements. Furthermore, staff members at agencies with dedicated kinship workers are significantly more likely to identify a typical kinship care placement as a "semi-permanent residence until the parents are able to provide a stable environment," suggesting that agencies with kinship workers are able to pursue reunification while managing kinship cases, as opposed to immediately establishing permanency.

The survey data also suggests that county agencies choosing to transfer custody are able to offer more supportive services to legal custodians than counties that generally hold temporary custody of children when placing with kin. Even so, caregivers holding custody are eligible for significantly less federal financial assistance than those licensed as foster parents, and six

agencies in this category do not appear to see kinship foster care as a viable option.

Furthermore, counties preferring to transfer custody are significantly less likely to have designated kinship workers. At the four agencies with designated kinship workers, however, the kinship programs appear to be strong.

A critical part of our search for causal relationships is still missing, as I have not yet examined how external factors may be impacting county agencies' kinship practices. Perhaps certain agencies have been able to dedicate kinship workers, expand their services, and continue pursuing reunification because their counties' conditions are conducive to the development of these kinship policy characteristics. The following section draws upon both quantitative and qualitative data to investigate the relevance of various factors that exist outside of the agencies' control.

(3) How do external forces impact county agencies' kinship policies?

Over the course of my interviews, staff members repeatedly emphasized the fact that public children service agencies do not exist in a vacuum; in fact, they are subject to a dynamic set of external factors that play a significant role in the evolution of local kinship care policies and procedures. In addition to the previously discussed impact of local juvenile courts, two themes emerged throughout the interviews: demographic variation and the funding streams that generate agencies' financial resources. Both quantitative and qualitative data shed light upon the relevance of these external variables.

Demographics

The 45 counties included in this study's sample exhibit diverse demographic characteristics. According to the 2010 Census, population sizes range from approximately 14.6 thousand to 1.28 million residents, and 59% of the state's total population resides in a participating county. Metropolitan, medium sized, and rural counties are all represented, and the percent of people living at or below the poverty rate ranges from 4.4% to 15.2%. Furthermore, counties have anywhere from 2% to 35.5% of inhabitants reporting a non-white race. These differences could potentially have a significant impact upon the policies and procedures affecting kinship caregivers across the sample of county agencies.

After running a series of t-tests, I found that the population sizes of counties whose agencies have kinship workers are significantly higher than those without kinship workers ($t = -2.562$, $p = 0.014$). The same is true regarding the percent of non-white residents ($t = -3.041$, $p = 0.004$). Further analysis indicates that these two variables are so highly correlated that statistically, it is impossible to tell which is more significant (Pearson's Correlation = 0.876, $p = 0.000$). Both could plausibly play a role, as counties with the largest population sizes are home to Ohio's large cities. These cities may have more resources than are available in the rural counties, resulting in a higher capability to dedicate workers for kinship placements; furthermore, since these areas have higher percentages of non-white residents, it is possible that certain ethnic groups' traditions of kinship care increase the need for kinship workers. One agency administrator identifies "culture" as a significant factor contributing to the variation across county agencies' kinship policies, explaining, "I think there are pockets of cultures that

will not turn their back on their children. Even if it's second, third, fourth cousins, twice removed, they don't care. That's my family, I'm gonna take care if it. So I think culture has something to do with it." The literature overwhelmingly suggests that most families engaging in kinship care are African American, a cultural group with a rich history of kinship caregiving (Geen 2004).

The percent of people at the poverty level also appears to impact kinship care across Ohio. This variable positively correlates with the amount of KPI funding spent per 100 children residing in a county. A bivariate linear regression indicates that as the number of people living in poverty increases by one percent, KPI expenditures increase by approximately \$5.5 per 100 children residing in a given county (Adjusted R Square = 0.089, $p = 0.026$). A number of factors could potentially explain why Ohio's more poverty-stricken counties make the most use of KPI benefits. For one, kinship caregivers in these counties may be more likely to fulfill KPI eligibility requirements, which include an income qualification. It is also possible that these counties have higher percentages of kinship caregivers, are more likely to transfer legal custody, or actively take advantage of available resources. An interviewee suggests that poverty inspires resourcefulness, remarking:

People that live in severe poverty, they know how to work things. When you are faced with having to pay your electric bill or feeding the babies, you figure out a way to have both. And that is, I may draw an extension cord from my neighbor this month, have electric and feed my babies, and next month they can feed their babies and I'll put my electric cord...They've got *amazing* ways of doing this stuff. That's just one example. But when you consider Appalachian, heavily impoverished people, they figure out ways to do things. I wish we had the ability to be as resourceful as some of the people that I've run into that are forced to be resourceful. So that may play a factor in.

Statistical tests suggest that demographic characteristics such as population size, percentage of non-white residents, and percentage of people living in poverty play a role in shaping the experiences of kinship caregivers by affecting both county KPI expenditures per 100 children and the likelihood of an agency dedicating a kinship worker. I cannot infer with statistical significance that they affect the number of available supportive services. These demographic variables are not the only external factors impacting kinship care policy across Ohio. In contexts shaped by unique demographic profiles, agencies operate under distinct funding structures using varying levels of financial resources. Interviewees identify funding as a critical driver of child welfare policy, leading to the next part of this discussion.

Funding Streams

The funding system under which Ohio child welfare agencies operate is complex but important to consider, as it could potentially be shaping a number of local policies across the state. Interviewees consistently identify funding as one of the major factors driving kinship policy. Although I cannot investigate every dimension of this complicated factor, I would like to consider several distinct ways in which county agencies could receive and utilize their funds.

An interviewed agency administrator explained to me that Ohio county agencies are funded by three main sources: federal, state, and local funds. The majority of this money comes from federal funding streams and local tax dollars, with the state contributing less than 10%. It turns out, however, that levels of local support and restrictions upon use of federal funds can vary considerable from county to county depending on several critical factors including

participation in ProtectOhio (which gives counties flexible federal block grants) and the presence of a levy (for local funds).

Of the forty-five counties in the sample, ten (22.2%) operate under a unique funding structure due to their participation in the ProtectOhio waiver. ProtectOhio, which was implemented in 1997 and renewed in 2004, gives participating counties flexible federal funding in place of the restricted Title IV-E reimbursements received by agencies throughout the rest of the state. Its primary goals are to reduce the number of children entering care, decrease the amount of time they stay in care, decrease the number of placements they experience in care, and increase reunification and permanent placement outcomes (Kimmich et al, 2010, p.7). The counties opting into this program must use innovative strategies to reduce placement costs. Across the state of Ohio, 18 counties (20.5%) currently participate in this program, and six agencies (6.8% of the state), all included in my sample, have chosen to focus upon kinship placements as a special intervention strategy.

I ran several statistical tests to measure the impact of ProtectOhio involvement upon various kinship policy characteristics and found that ProtectOhio counties are significantly more likely to have dedicated kinship workers than those not participating in the waiver (chi square = 7.522, $p=0.006$). Furthermore, these counties are more likely to offer support groups for kinship foster parents (chi square = 4.114, $p = 0.043$), and their KPI expenditures are higher by an average of \$74.28 per 100 kids (Adjusted R Square = .127, Beta = .383, $p = .009$). They also provide more supportive services to kinship caregivers in all three legal arrangements (most notably for legal custodians), although these differences are not statistically significant.

Interviews with staff members from three ProtectOhio counties reveal a number of ways in which flexible funding has allowed these agencies to extend support to kinship caregivers. One agency, for example, contracts a local attorney for voluntary kinship caregivers seeking legal custody, and another is able to provide financial assistance to caregivers on a case-by-case basis. All three have kinship navigators. An interviewed kinship navigator describes,

In [this] county, we have been fortunate enough within the last couple years to actually have a stand-alone kinship unit, and I actually oversee that unit and I've got a couple persons back here, one of which who works directly with kinship caregivers in ongoing cases. In other words, if we get a call that a child is getting abused or neglected and it gets opened for ongoing services, we have a worker within my unit here that her specific job is to work with those grandparents or other relatives that are caring for the children while the parents are working on the case plan. So that worker is directly involved with every ongoing worker and knows if we've even got an assessment worker or ongoing worker that's going to court and placing with a relative, she's getting hooked up with that relative as soon as possible and meeting with that relative and asking lots of different questions that goes back to our ProtectOhio philosophy in assuring that their needs are met.

According to the HSRI evaluation of the ProtectOhio Kinship Strategy, staff members at agencies that have implemented the kinship strategy describe a shift in agency culture towards one that prioritizes kinship care. This theme emerged in my interviews as well. Staff members from two ProtectOhio counties emphasize that administration and staff buy-in have been critical for implementing an effective kinship program. A kinship unit coordinator explains that participation in ProtectOhio was initially a risky endeavor, and therefore, "you have to have the right administration to flip your agency. If you don't have complete buy-in from the people who are going to implement the program, and be able to talk professionally and intelligently about why it's effective, then its not going to be effective in your agency. Because you're only as

strong as the line workers. They really are the ones that are going to make the program effective.” If a program was ineffective and placement costs were to exceed the limits of the block grant, ProtectOhio agencies would not be reimbursed by federal funds. This funding model, however, appears to have positively impacted kinship care policies in participating counties.

For county agencies not operating under flexible funding, the allocation of state and federal money generally involves a number of mandates and restrictions that may limit agencies’ capabilities to support their kinship care providers. These dollars are transferred through the state, and, for the most part, they must be used to administer a foster care program (and train and reimburse foster parents), make adoption assistance payments, implement data collection in the online reporting system (SACWIS), and meet state mandates. One kinship worker explains, “Our moneys, our state moneys that allow us to practice child welfare, come from fulfilling mandates and those mandates can be getting your dictation in on time or making sure you visit a child so many times a month. So I think that instead of being able to think of some of all the things it takes to create a supported family, caseworkers instead are driven to meet their mandates. And that’s an unfortunate reality.” An administrator at the same county adds that those mandates are often limited to intake: the point at which a case is investigated, relatives are identified, and the placement is arranged. No mandates demand that agencies provide ongoing support for their kinship caregivers, although some interviewed staff members believe that they should. Most agencies must therefore depend upon limited ESAA, PRC, and local funds to pay for the majority of kinship support.

In order to designate local child welfare funds, many counties use a levy, through which voters approve the allocation of their local tax dollars. An agency administrator at one of the fourteen counties that have a levy but are not involved with ProtectOhio speaks to the implications of this model. He says:

There's no funding for (supporting kinship caregivers). If you put funding towards that, you're gonna be taking it out of your local tax dollars...So you think of the total cost of child welfare, 60% comes from the Feds, reimbursements for placements and funding streams that they have, and 8% comes from the state, and the rest is local funds... You're talking millions of dollars! So if we're asking the taxpayers for millions of dollars for placement costs, how much more can we ask for for relative support? Because you can't always control the costs of paid placements. So, the support's not there. It's unfortunate because of everything I've already told you. We know the outcomes are better. Well, put the money where the outcomes are better! But, people aren't there yet. They're not there legislatively. They're not there through the courts. They're not there through a lot of individual caseworkers, I guess.

Despite fiscal barriers, a number of counties operating under this funding structure appear to have allocated resources to supporting kinship caregivers. Eight agencies have designated at least one kinship worker. Several provide financial stipends for kinship caregivers, and according to a survey respondent representing one of these agencies, "They just increased the pay for our kin caregivers and it is wonderful! This helps them so much!" Two counties included in this sample indicate that they are currently working to expand the financial and supportive services available for kinship caregivers in hopes of mirroring their foster care programs, and two even have kinship navigators. One county has a family search and engagement team, and many have purchased Accurint or other tools for relative search.

To varying degrees, a number of county agencies appear to have made conscious efforts to dedicate portions of their funds to kinship caregivers. Some counties in my sample, however, are unable to levy local tax dollars, and according to an agency administrator, this could seriously impact an agency's ability to invest in kinship caregivers. Using 2009 public expenditure data obtained from a PCSAO Factbook (2011-2012), I ran two bivariate regressions to test the impact of a levy upon total expenditures and upon the percent supplied by local funds. All 88 counties are included, and both tests yielded statistical significance; statewide, the presence of a levy increases the average total expenditures by \$17,481,585.00 (Adjusted R Square = .092, $p = 0.002$) and increases the percentage supplied by local funding by 12.01% (Adjusted R Square = .207, $p = 0.000$). Additional statistical tests reveal that this variable may be critical to explaining Ohio's kinship policy variation. A chi square analysis indicates that in my sample, counties without a levy are significantly less likely to dedicate kinship workers than those with a levy (chi square = 10.197, $p = 0.001$); furthermore, the counties without levies exhibit lower KPI expenditures, averaging \$54.486 (per 100 children) less than counties that do pass local levies (Adjusted R Square = 0.093, Beta = .338, $p = 0.023$).

This brings me to an alarming finding regarding funding for Ohio's county agencies: data indicates that 21 of the 45 counties included in this sample are not only excluded from ProtectOhio flexible funding waiver, but also operate without children services levies (limiting their access to local tax dollars). These twenty-one counties comprise approximately 47% of the sample and face serious fiscal barriers to supporting kinship caregivers. Only three counties in this category have designated kinship workers, whereas 18 do not. Furthermore, half of the eighteen counties

without kinship workers indicate that they prefer transferring custody to relatives, suggesting that their kinship care providers may not be receiving the Title IV-E foster parent stipends. The agencies in this category generally have the fewest resources for alleviating kinship caregivers' financial burdens; however, survey respondents suggest that even among these counties, several agencies have explored cost efficient ways of investing in kinship care. One agency has created a kinship packet that is given to caregivers at the point of inquiry in order to "prepare them as well as well as assist us in receiving the information we need to determine whether or not the placement will be an option." Support groups and newsletter are also offered at several of these counties. Finally, multiple survey respondents describe special efforts occurring at the intake level, including use of genogram software and development of relative search forms.

Analysis has revealed notable patterns among county agencies that operate under the three general funding structures considered in this study. Counties with flexible funding are the most likely to have designated kinship workers. Their counties make notably high use of KPI benefits, and they appear to offer the highest number of additional supportive services to kin in all three legal arrangements. Counties operating without flexible funding or levy funds, on the other hand, are the most restricted in terms of financially supporting kinship caregivers. Even within these three distinct categories, however, it is apparent that agency staff and administration have chosen to prioritize kinship care to varying degrees and in a range of ways.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, the Ohio child welfare system has undergone a significant shift in its reliance upon kinship caregivers. Staff members at various public child welfare agencies assert that, “ten years ago, we were still saying, ‘No! No relatives, at all.’” Extended families of the children’s birth parents were seen as dangerous, inappropriate placements because “the acorn doesn’t fall far from the tree.” This mentality is changing nation-wide, and Ohio now openly recognizes kinship care as a critical aspect of child welfare policy and practice, mandating counties to seek out relatives upon removing children from their birth parents’ homes. The state has not, however, reached an agreement regarding expected levels of agency involvement and support of kinship families. Design and implementation of kinship policy has been left to the discretion of public children services agencies throughout Ohio’s state-supervised and county-administered child welfare system, allowing for considerable variation in treatment of kinship caregivers from county to county.

This study has attempted to identify the main differences between agencies’ kinship policies and investigate their causes and implications. Representatives of forty-five of Ohio’s eighty-eight county agencies participated in a kinship policy survey, and through a series of interviews, six staff members at four of these agencies, as well as a local juvenile court judge, shared additional insights regarding the complex dynamics shaping child welfare policy and practice. Results illuminate a range of factors that appear to impact county agencies’ procedures pertaining to kinship care. Both qualitative and quantitative data suggests that decisions made not only by an agency’s administration, but also individual workers, state and federal legislators,

juvenile courts, and even local voters can impact kinship caregivers' experiences with the child welfare system at various points throughout the life of a case.

Upon receiving the survey responses, I immediately stumbled upon an unexpected phenomenon; I found that among responses from the twenty agencies that were represented by more than one survey respondent, almost every question pertaining to non-mandated procedures yielded intra-county inconsistencies. This finding may have serious implications, revealing that even within a given agency, staff members have varying impressions of the assessment requirements for legal and temporary custodians, the permanency options discussed with kin, and the availability of financial assistance and other supportive services for kinship caregivers. Interviewed staff members attribute these inconsistencies to frequent procedural changes and employees' varying levels of awareness regarding services for kinship caregivers. They add that workers' personal philosophies may also play a role, as those who have practiced for several decades under a different ideology may choose not to actively invest in relative search or seek out referrals for kinship supports.

Certain factors lie outside of individual workers' hands, depending primarily upon the decisions of agency administrators and local juvenile judges. These include an agency's investment in search tools, preferred legal and licensure status for kinship caregivers, and designation of a kinship worker. After selecting one survey response to represent each participating county, it was possible to investigate the implications of these policy characteristics across the entire sample. I found that dedication of a kinship worker not only increases the number of supportive services available for kin foster parents, temporary custodians, and legal

custodians, but it also appears to increase the likelihood that an agency will pursue reunification while managing kinship cases. Agencies with kinship workers are most likely to prefer maintaining custody while placing with relatives, a factor that significantly increases the average number of supportive services available for kinship foster parents. It is more common, however, for counties in this sample to prefer transferring temporary custody to relatives, a practice that leads to increased levels of supportive services for legal custodians and, to a smaller extent, temporary custodians. Unless these counties are able to provide support of substantial monetary value, however, legal and temporary custodians generally receive significantly less financial assistance than kin foster parent due to restrictions upon distribution of federal benefits.

Further investigation illuminates that both designation of a kinship worker and the disparities in supportive services available for kin of varying legal and licensure statuses depend in large part upon county demographics and agencies' federal, state, and local funding streams. The implications of state mandates and federal restrictions appear to be especially profound, according to both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Counties with flexible federal funding are the most likely to designate kinship workers and offer substantial supportive services, followed by non-ProtectOhio counties that can levy local funds. Almost half of this sample's counties (and 45% of counties statewide), however, have neither flexible funding nor local children services levies and therefore face significant barriers to serving kinship caregivers. Of these twenty-one counties in my sample, only three (14%) have been able to dedicate workers specifically to kinship care, a factor that has been shown to significantly impact a range of other kinship policy characteristics.

Even if a county agency were to entirely shift its culture to prioritize kinship care, the absence of flexible funding and inability to pass a local levy would still appear to impose significant barriers to supporting kinship caregivers due to federal funding restrictions, which often link to the orders of a local juvenile court. County agencies' hands are tied, to an extent, by the judgment calls of these external agents. Interviewed staff members hypothesize that the resulting structures reflect the prevalence of a common national philosophy: that families should take care of their own. The general public may, however, be unaware of the fact that kinship caregivers tend to be poorer, older, less educated and of poorer health than non-kin foster parents. They may not understand the significant challenges that kinship caregivers face upon unexpectedly taking in another child. A kinship worker states, "There's just a lack of some knowledge out there. I think there's a lack of knowledge of how many relatives are caring for their kin. I think there's a lack of knowledge of how costly that can be to a family and the different difficulties it could bring, and challenges. So I think there's a popular philosophy, which is right, that families should take care of their own, yet I think that the lack of knowledge comes into how expensive and life-changing that can be and why they need to be supported."

This modern ideology reflects a sense of moral individualism that, according to Durkheim, has come to characterize our modern society. Kinship policies emerge as multiple decision-makers, each operating based on information and philosophies drawn from their distinct personal and professional contexts, generate a complicated system that ultimately transforms the lived experiences of Ohio's kinship families. The resulting policies integrate discourses of recognition, mutual obligation, and the market to ultimately resemble the object of my

theoretical investigation: a power apparatus that has the potential to either dominate or empower all involved individuals. The theoretical contributions of Durkheim, Foucault, Honneth, and Collins provide a useful tool not only for understanding these complicated systems, but also for developing a course for further action.

Throughout the state of Ohio, kinship networks are entering the formalized arena of child welfare, and agencies and caregivers must increasingly rely upon one another to survive in a neoliberal climate. This partnership has provided local agencies with an inexpensive placement option that reduces trauma and disruption for children whom they must remove from homes; however, the theoretical insights of Honneth and Durkheim suggest that this child welfare tool can only be expected to function effectively if the physical and emotional needs of caregivers are also met. Otherwise, caregivers may experience this system as a form of domination and exploitation, which, according to Collins, may impose lasting tensions and negatives expressions of power upon misrecognized kinship families. By taking the form of Foucaultian systems of discourse and power, these kinship policies could, on the other hand, potentially empower kinship caregivers to positively shape the present actualities of the children in their care.

Policy Implications

In order to empower these families to achieve the goals of safety, permanency, and child wellbeing, the allocation of child welfare resources must be modified to allow for the support of kinship caregivers across the state of Ohio. Currently, only eighteen ProtectOhio counties can use their federal funds to develop kinship programs; most counties must instead rely upon local funding streams. The 43 poorest counties across the state of Ohio are therefore largely unable to

support their kinship families or to dedicate workers for kinship care because they cannot pass children services levies. The current funding structure thus poses serious threats to a county-based child welfare system that is increasingly growing in reliance upon kinship caregivers, especially if counties continue to push for the transfer of custody to relatives. An agency administrator describes the child welfare system's financial dependency upon kinship placements and endorses a call for funding reform, explaining:

Bottom line is, they're going to run out of money if they don't do something about the cost of care. The only way to control that is to find relatives that are safe and that are willing. So if we don't start putting our resources towards that, eventually we'll run out of money. So that's not going to do the kids any good, because what happens when you run out of money? You run out of services. You can't provide. So then you just start doing mandates. In child services mandates are limited to intake work, investigation. And right now, taking custody of kids when the court orders it.

Another policy proposal that could potentially improve Ohio's kinship care situation, according to both survey data and interviews, is the designation of a state or federally funded kinship-specific position in every county across the state of Ohio. A current kinship navigator explains,

We need navigators to help navigate counties in this matter, because it's not going away. It's on the rise. We have more now than ever. And I think we need to devote some funding to navigators to be able to be a resource to counties on the do's and don'ts and being able to stand up and then disseminate that information to all the counties so that we can all be on the same page.

Both quantitative and qualitative data illuminate the value of designated kinship workers not only for expanding available supports for kinship caregivers, but also for increasing

awareness regarding kinship policy and generating an agency culture that prioritizes kinship care. There are currently only seven counties with federally funded Kinship Navigator programs, each of which is involved in the ProtectOhio waiver. An evaluation of these programs has found the outcomes to be positive.

Finally, this study has found that a number of individuals from various contexts, operating under a diversity of philosophies, can significantly shape the policies that ultimately determine an agency's level of involvement with kinship families and the accessibility of resources for kinship caregivers. In order to create a more unified system that allows county agencies to develop innovative and comprehensive kinship programs, it may be critical to improve the lines of communication between local agency administrators, workers, and juvenile courts. Agencies operating under varying levels of financial security must be represented at statewide meetings during which decisions pertaining to kinship care are discussed, as their situations appear to vary considerably depending upon restrictions on federal and local funding streams. Perhaps, these decision-makers can then one day choose to allocate resources in pursuance of a shared kinship philosophy, a common vision that strives to strengthen families across the state of Ohio.

Suggestions for Further Research

Nation-wide, kinship policies have been severely understudied by social scientists, especially in states with county-based child welfare systems. This study is the first to investigate kinship policies across a random sample of Ohio's public children service agencies. The findings, although significant, are limited in reliability and illuminate a need for further research.

Intra-agency inconsistencies among survey responses reveal a possibility that some survey questions may have been ambiguous, confusing, or irrelevant. The survey is also not entirely comprehensive, due to efforts to minimize its length. These limitations attest to the value of qualitative methods. In this study, however, only seven formal interviews were conducted with a non-random sample. No staff members from counties without levies or kinship workers were represented.

Future researchers should consider interviewing staff members from a larger number of county agencies and perhaps engaging in participant observation to investigate agency cultures surrounding kinship care. Furthermore, it will be critical to link various policy characteristics to placement outcomes, such as repeat maltreatment rates, reunification rates, placement lengths and permanent legal outcomes. Independent variables might include dedication of a kinship worker, provision of various supportive services, and decisions to transfer custody. Ohio's kinship research, conducted by the HSRI, has utilized mixed methods approaches to evaluate the policies and outcomes of the ProtectOhio and Kinship Navigator programs; however, counties with the most restricted funding streams have generally been overlooked. Only two of the fifteen comparison counties included in the 2012 ProtectOhio program evaluation operate without a local levy. This category of counties could be better represented in future policy research.

Finally, I encourage researchers to disseminate future findings in order to educate the legislators, judges, agency administrators, social workers, and local voters about the implications of their decisions for families involved in formal kinship care. Perhaps social scientists could

partake in constructing a system that allows local agencies to engage in reciprocal partnerships with their clients' kinship networks, in order to assure that "Ohio's children, youth and vulnerable adults have a safe and permanent family that nurtures and promotes their overall well-being," in accordance with the vision of the Office of Families and Children at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. In sharing her management philosophy with me, an executive director of a local child welfare agency spells out, "Basic human dignity and respect: If I give my staff that, I believe they'll give the client that." By institutionalizing this leadership model and creating a system that recognizes kinship caregivers as valued individuals with basic human needs, perhaps we can start a domino effect, empowering families to embody the principles of dignity and respect.

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Appendix A: Cover Letter and Survey Questions

Dear Public Children Services Agency Directors,

My name is Andreja Siliunas. I am a senior at the College of Wooster, graduating with a major in sociology. Over the past few years, I have been involved as an intern at Wayne County Children Services. I have worked exclusively in the Placement Department on special projects, more specifically working with family finding efforts and relative/kinship supportive efforts.

This year, I attended the Ohio Grandparent Kinship Coalition conference, where I had the privilege to learn more about relative caregiver experiences, the challenges of attaining supportive services, and the differences between counties' policies and practices pertaining to relatives. It was immediately clear to me that the state of Ohio is committed to supporting relatives who care for kin children.

This experience has inspired my deep interest in how counties' policies and procedures affect the permanency outcomes of the children in relative homes, and I have decided to make this topic the subject of my senior thesis. I believe that the information to be gathered is valuable and relevant across the state. I therefore hope to turn the results over to PCSAO Director Crystal Ward Allen and ODJFS President Dr. Colbert for their further assessment and program evaluation.

I understand that many of the counties are experiencing a high case load and your time is limited. For this reason, I have designed my survey to include only the most crucial variables and take only moments of your time. To get multiple perspectives on your agency, I ask you to please forward the survey link to supervisors of each unit to be completed or passed on to a worker. **Survey responses must be submitted by Friday, November 22.** If you or any other agency staff would like to speak further and provide greater insight about this topic, I would welcome a phone interview and can be reached at asiliunas14@wooster.edu or (708)738-1693.

The survey can be accessed by clicking the following link:
https://wooster.col.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_ahO7sdwxw0a07OQZ

Thank you!

Sincerely,
Andreja Siliunas

Ohio Kinship Policy Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this ten-question survey.

Questions address your agency's kinship care policy for cases involving investigations of child abuse and neglect.

Default Question Block

County/Agency and Unit:

1. If it is determined that a child cannot remain safely at home, at what point are caseworkers instructed to seek out relatives who can care for the child?

- Upon removal
- Upon shelter care
- Upon adjudication
- Upon disposition
- Not at all
- Other (please specify)

2. What resources are available to caseworkers to allow them to conduct a diligent search for relatives? Please describe the process by which potential kinship caregivers are identified.

3. If it has been determined that the child cannot remain safely at home and a relative agrees to care for the child, what custody arrangement does the agency generally pursue?

- The agency maintains custody while placing the child with relatives
-

The agency transfers temporary custody to relative/kin and continues to work on case plan objectives with parents

- The agency transfers legal custody to relative/kin and closes the case
- Other (please specify)

4. Which of the following are caseworkers instructed to do in cases where (a) a relative agrees to take placement of a child who is in the custody of the state (kin foster caregivers), (b) a relative is given temporary custody of the child while the agency stays involved, or (c) the relative is given legal custody and the agency closes the case? Please insert check marks in the appropriate columns for all that apply.

	(a) for kin foster parents	(b) for kin with temporary custody	(c) for kin with legal custody
Assess the relative's ability for care. If yes, the assessment consists of:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local criminal background check	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BCI/FBI background check	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ICPC interstate check	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SACWIS check	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home Safety Audit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial Assessment or Monthly Budget to assess financial stability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assessment of medical/physical status	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>			
Assess the needs of the kin/relative caregiver	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seek adjudication of the child as abused or neglected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide in-home reunification services to the child's birth parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discuss Permanency Planning with Relatives. If yes, please indicate which permanency options are discussed:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal custody to kin/relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal guardianship to kin/relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adoption by relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PPLA with relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reunification with biological family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>			

5. Which of the following services or supports are available to relative caregivers in cases where (a) a relative agrees to take placement of a child who is in the custody of the state (kin foster caregivers), (b) a relative is given temporary custody of the child while the agency stays involved, or (c) the relative is given legal custody and the agency closes the case? Please insert check marks in the appropriate columns for all that apply.

(a) for kin (b) for kin with (c) for kin

	foster parents	temporary custody	with legal custody
Referral for KPI	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referral for DJFS child only benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Title IV-E foster care payment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Redirect child support payment to kin/relative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other cash payments (please specify) <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal aid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Case management services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent education services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent living/life skills programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transitional youth housing services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental health services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respite care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home needs (furniture, appliances, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clothing allowance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transportation assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Holiday supportive programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support groups for caregivers and/or caregiver kids	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information and Referral	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify) <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Does the agency dedicate a worker to kin/relative placements?

- Yes
 No

7. Does the agency provide funding to any “external” positions that support kin (for example, supporting external kinship navigator programs, legal aid, support groups, etc.)? Please list.

8. Which of the following do you think best describes a typical kinship/relative placement arranged by your agency?

- The child's permanent home until emancipation

- A semi-permanent residence until the parents are able to provide a stable environment
- A semi-permanent residence at risk of disruption due to child behavior, lack of supports, repeat maltreatment, etc
- A temporary placement until a temporary court order expires
- None of the above

9. To your knowledge, approximately what percentage of children in kinship/relative placements (that have been involved with your agency) come back under investigation, with either the relative or a biological parent as the AP?

- 0-10%
- 10-25%
- 25-50%
- 50-75%
- 75-100%

10. Please note any recent changes in your agency's kinship policy that were not mandated by the state.

Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions

Sample Interview Questions for Agency Staff and Administration

To start out, would you mind introducing yourself, telling me a little bit about your position and how it relates to kinship care?

How would you describe your county's philosophy toward placing children with kinship caregivers?

At your agency, do staff members across different units follow a pretty streamlined protocol (standard procedure) when it comes to kinship care, or do you think that there might be some variation?

What causes that variation with a single agency?

How would you describe the kinship care situation across Ohio in general?

What factors might be impacting the different policies/philosophies from county to county?

From your perspective, what is the situation like for kinship caregivers in your county (in comparison to the rest of the state)?

What about your county's kinship policy is successful? Can you offer any ideas/suggestions that might benefit other counties and the state overall?

Interview Questions for Judge Wiles

When a child is removed from home and placed by WCCSB with a kinship caregiver, do you generally prefer to initially transfer custody to the relatives or the agency?

- How does your decision usually compare with the agency's request?
- What goes into that decision?

Later on in the case, if the biological parents are not completing the case plan and the relatives agree to take the child permanently, what type of custody would you typically grant the relatives?

- What are the main factors that you take into consideration when determining the permanent custodial arrangement for kinship cases?
- Is assessment of the caregivers' needs taken into account when determining "child's best interest"?

So, in general, do you have a philosophy regarding government involvement (and transfer of custody) at different stages of a case?

- What informs that philosophy?
- Do you have a network of connections that you gather information/ideas from? (Are there trainings, etc, that you attend to understand the social work dimension?)

Do you think that judges are pretty familiar with the resources available to caregivers based on their legal status?

At the state level, there have been discussions about streamlining the legal process for kinship caregivers. Do you think that would be a good idea? How should it be streamlined, in your opinion?