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Tracey Ann Burris

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Review Committee

Dr. Karel Kurst-Swanger, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Mark Gordon, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

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Abstract

Child Welfare Professionals' Perspectives on Managing Dually Involved African
American Female Youth

by

Tracey Ann Burris

MA, Walden University, 2010

BS, Southern Illinois University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Dually involved are youth who have experienced some type of child abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, and/or neglect) and have engaged in delinquency. This study was conducted to understand child welfare professionals' experiences and perspectives of the out-of-home placement decision-making process for dually involved African American female youth and impacts to the developmental process of this population. In this qualitative study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was used to identify the developmental levels of these disruptions and served as the theoretical framework. In this research, data were collected through semistructured interviews with 11 child welfare professionals from public and private child welfare agencies in the southern region of the state of Illinois. All participants were child welfare professionals with experience in making out-of-home placement decisions for dually involved Black girls. Thematic analysis approaches were used to identify themes and subthemes from the data. The findings identified several themes related to placement decisions, stability and disruptions, including barriers (e.g., school disruptions) and disruptions to development (e.g., bias, stereotype), and systemic barriers (e.g., lack of resources). Distinct themes were also identified related to the placement decisions, placement stability and development. Child welfare professionals also described multiple types of barriers that impacted the decision-making process. The findings of this study have potential implications for positive social change by providing child welfare policy makers with data and recommendations to improve the out-of-home placement decision-making processes and to improve system outcomes for dually involved youth.

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Dedication

I dedicate this document to my family: I love you all deeply. To my son, Tristan Burris, for your quiet support and encouraging words to keep moving forward. To my parents, mom, June A. Burris, ‘wind beneath my wings’; dad, Vernell Burris, who made this possible and for your unwavering support—a supporter in everything I do. To my “you got this” friends, Angela Sastry and Elizabeth Smith, you both reminded not to listen to others and to stay the course. Angie, so many times you reminded me to enjoy the journey. To Dr. Collins, you always provided a listening ear and quiet encouragement. To my cousin Dr. Rolanda Burris, thank you for sharing your experiences of your journey. Without your unwavering support and encouragement, this journey would have been daunting and my success would not have been so wondrous. I hope this research inspires more conversations and literature advances on the foster care system and juvenile justice system.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency, juvenile crime offenses, and child abuse are a social concern (Ryan et al., 2007). During 2018 in the United States, 728,280 youth were arrested and an estimated 678,000 youth entered the child welfare system because of allegations of child abuse and neglect (Children's Defense Fund, 2020; Puzzanchera, 2020). Between 2019 and 2022, the number of youth involved in both child welfare and juvenile justice has grown to such an extent that terms such as *crossover* and *dually involved* have been used to identify this growing population that includes a significant overrepresentation of African American youth. Delinquency rates are 47% higher for youth who have experienced one indicated report of child abuse (Ryan & Testa, 2005). The consequences for girls who experience child abuse involve greater rates of delinquency (Asscher et al., 2015; Ryan et al., 2007). Child delinquency and abuse weaken social bonds and create disruptions in placement stability, academics, and development; all factors are associated with out-of-home placement and increased risk for delinquency (Yoon et al., 2018).

African American youth are disproportionately represented in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, with girls representing the fastest growing segment. African American girls involved with both administrative systems experience a greater level of structural and systematic stereotypes and racist views, greater length of time in out-of-home placement, and systematic barriers including increased scrutiny and hypervigilance from both systems (Simmons-Horton, 2021). Few studies have been conducted to explore

the effect of systemic barriers and disparity in treatment of dually involved girls—specifically, African American dually involved female youths’ experiences with substitute care, placement stability, placement disruption, and social connections. Furthermore, few studies have been conducted to explore child welfare professionals’ perspective and their decision-making processes for out-of-home placement.

The Children’s Defense Fund (2020) noted that African American youth overall representation in the child welfare system is double their representation in the population. In 2018, there were 73.4 million children in the United States, accounting for 22% of the nation’s population; minority children accounted for 49.7% of all children (Children’s Defense Fund, 2020). Minority youth represent a disproportion number of youth in the child welfare system and juvenile justice system: 67% (Puzzanchera, 2020). Approximately 43,580 minority youth were placed in a child welfare residential facility at a rate twice that of nonminority youth, and ethnic minority youth were detained five times that of White youth (Puzzanchera, 2020).

Decades of research and literature have established the relationship between juvenile delinquency and child abuse (Herz et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2007). For many minority youth, the child welfare system represents a pathway to the juvenile justice system. In addition, the relationship between the out-of-home placement and the risk of delinquency for maltreated youth suggests an increased likelihood this population will engage in delinquent behaviors (Patrick & Chaudhry, 2017).

Thus far, the literature on juvenile delinquency has been focused largely on offending and arrest rates among male juveniles; however, over the past two decades,

girls have become the fastest growing population in the juvenile justice system. Research has shown that girls enter the juvenile justice system with multiple environmental, social, and family stressors. Adolescent girls turn to drugs or engage in risky sexual behavior to escape the pain of home, school, neighborhood, and community or to gain a sense of belonging through negative peer interactions, criminal activity, or gang membership (Bergman, 2014; Chauhan & Reppucci, 2009; Chesney-Lind 2001; Hurst et al., 2005; Miazad, 2002; Pleydon & Schner, 2001; Sondheimer, 2001). Because of the increase in involvement in both the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system among African American female youth, researchers are paying more attention to this population and its involvement in both administrative systems.

Research is relatively new for youth that are dually involved or that cross over from the child welfare system to the juvenile justice system (Herz et al., 2019). *Crossover, dual contact, or dually involved* are terms used for youth who have experienced some type of child abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, and/or neglect) and have engaged in delinquency or criminal behaviors (Herz et al., 2010). Many youth involved in both systems face numerous and significant challenges, including negative outcomes through adolescence and adulthood, and disparities at all stages of the decision-making process from entry to exit from the child welfare systems. This creates disproportionality and overrepresentation of African American youth in the child welfare system (Cenat et al., 2021; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; Dettlaff et al., 2015).

Although racial disproportionality and racial disparity are different, they are interconnected given that disparities occur at any of the child welfare system decision-

making steps. Involvement in the juvenile justice system and child welfare system was related to poor outcomes for minority girls who face unique challenges (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; Martin & Esenstad, 2015). Studies previously conducted in the United States found that racial minority youth face disparities in the child welfare system, including increased rates of reporting, substantiation, and out-of-home placement (Cenat et al., 2021). One study that included child welfare professionals' voices acknowledged Black families' experiences and the role of racial bias in decision making and in the assessment process and interventions used to assist families (Miller et al., 2012). Other factors that influenced the removal-from-home decision may not be related to the case itself but personal to the child welfare professional or organization factors. Personal characteristics of the decision makers may play a significant role, including factors specific to the caseworker. These factors can influence the removal process, which may allow subjectivity and bias to enter the decision-making process. Key decisions are made in a short time with limited or missing information, the context of the agency, inconsistent guidelines, high caseloads, and the caseworker being vulnerable to errors. Child welfare professionals are situated in and influenced by the environment (Dettlaff et al., 2015).

A growing number of researchers have begun researching the impact that race and ethnicity have on the removal process and substitute care. However, factors specific to the decision makers, what the factors are, and how they are interrelated have not yet been thoroughly explored or explained. Subsequently, explaining disproportionality and disparity continues to be debated and unclear (Cenat et al., 2021; Dettlaff et al, 2015; Richardson et al., 2018).

Chapter 1 includes the problem statement and information explaining its significance. In Chapter 1, I identify the purpose and intent of the study followed by the guiding research questions. I discuss the theoretical framework, including the relationship between the theory and research questions. I present the nature of the study and the methodology and a list of key term definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations.

Background

Youth involved in the child welfare system face several challenges, such as multisystem involvement, poor education, challenging employment, and placement instability. In addition, youth involved with the child welfare system are at a higher risk for delinquency; 9%–29% of youth involved with the child welfare system become involved with the juvenile justice system. In addition, high school dropout rates are more than 50% among this population (Swanson, 2008). In addition, youth involved with foster care experience more difficulties transitioning to adulthood (Massinga & Pecora, 2004).

Data have shown a strong correlation between the presence of maltreatment history in a child's record and involvement in the juvenile justice system; 64% of youth involved in the juvenile justice system experienced child abuse at some point in their history (Mertens & Blom, 2015). In the United States, in 2014, 3,261,000 children received child protective services, and in 2018, 3,534,000 children received child protective services. Data from 2018 also show 84.5% of victims suffered abuse; 60.8% experienced neglect, 10.7% experienced physical abuse, 7.0% experienced sexual abuse,

and 15.5% experienced two or more abuse types (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020).

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 (CAPTA; P.L. 93–247) brought national attention to the need for protection of children, prosecution of child abusers, and the need for community resources and services. The child welfare system is designed to bring together services and resources to promote the best interests of children by ensuring safety, well-being, and permanency (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020a). CAPTA and child welfare laws recognize and define situations in which parental rights can be limited for the protection of the child. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) code of ethics for child welfare professionals has empowered child welfare professionals and given them the authority and responsibility to meet the needs of abused and neglected children and to intervene in the lives of families (Kane, 2010).

Youth who are determined to be at risk of harm and in imminent danger of continued abuse may be moved to a relative's home, a shelter, or foster home while the investigation and court proceedings are pending. To protect the child, courts can determine if the child should remain under the jurisdiction of the court, placing the child in the custody of the child welfare system (Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Nationwide statistics show a continuous decline in juvenile arrests from 2006 through 2018 (Puzzanchera, 2019). The number of juvenile arrests for violent crimes declined 5% in 2018 (Puzzanchera, 2019). Overall, juvenile arrests for property crime have shown a continuous decline since the 1990s (Puzzanchera, 2019). Other U.S.

nationwide statistics show a decline in delinquency cases among juveniles charged with crime rates, a 2.0% decrease from 2018 (Hockenberry, 2022). From 2005 through 2019, the number of delinquency cases declined 56%, showing decreases in all four offense categories (Hockenberry, 2022). In 2019, the juvenile courts handled 200,300 cases involving girls compared to the 522,300 cases involving boys. During this same period, the decline was the same for male and female youth (Hockenberry, 2022). In 2019, Black youth represented 19% of delinquency cases and 15% of the U.S. juvenile population, compared with White youth representing 43% of delinquency cases and 53% of the juvenile population (Hockenberry, 2022). In 2019, youth 15 years of age and younger accounted for 54% of all delinquency cases. Declines in arrests were greater for boys than for girls (Puzzanchera, 2020).

In 2014, delinquency cases involving female youth increased across two categories: simple assault (24%) and larceny theft offenses (24%; Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2018). Between 2014 and 2015, juvenile girls accounted for over half of all runaway cases petitioned; female juvenile cases were more likely to be diverted or receive probation than male juvenile cases (Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2018). In 2015, juveniles ages 15 or older accounted for 67% of female delinquency cases. Black juveniles represented 15% of the female youth population and 35% of the female delinquency caseload. Fifty-four percent involved minority youth in 2015 with Black girls representing more than 35% of all female delinquency cases (Ehrmann et al., 2019).

During 2015, delinquency cases involving Black girls were three times more likely to be referred to the juvenile court than cases involving Hispanic or White girls

(Ehrmann et al., 2019). Between 2006 and 2015 arrests of juvenile girls reached their lowest level in 30 years; arrests of juvenile girls declined 53%. Female youth accounted for one third of all juvenile arrests in 2018 (Ehrmann et al., 2019).

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, juvenile arrest nationwide statistics in the United States show a decrease in juvenile arrests for the years of 2006 through 2019 (Ehrmann et al., 2019; Hockenberry, 2022; Puzzanchera, 2019; Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2018). Data estimate a substantial 67.0% decrease from the nationwide peak in 1994; notable decreases from 2006 through 2018 in arrests for juvenile violent crimes offenses reduced by 50.0% from 2008 through 2018, juvenile arrests for property crime offenses dropped 73.0% (Puzzanchera, 2020). This decrease in juvenile arrests is reflected in the decrease in the juvenile offender population in custody, which also declined by one-third between 1997 and 2018 (Puzzanchera, 2020).

According to the 2017 Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (CJRP) nationwide statistics report, youth held in residential placement declined by 59.0% between 1997 and 2017 (Hockenberry, 2020a). However, girls accounted for 15.0% of the placement population; minority youth in placement accounted for 67.0%. Both public and private facilities showed a decrease, with public facilities showing a 59.0% decrease versus the 57.0% decrease in youth held in private facilities (Hockenberry, 2020).

Nationwide statistics demonstrate that gender and racial differences in offenses, arrests, and placement trends are decreasing in the aggregate. The numbers also showed a 30-year low in juvenile arrests; however, as juvenile arrests lower, there continues to be a disproportionate number of minority youth, and arrest rates for girls have increased over

the last 30 years. According to the U.S. Department of Justice juvenile justice statistics (Puzzanchera, 2020) estimated in 2018 there were 728,280 arrests for youth under the age of 17—the lowest number of arrests since 1996. Between 2009 and 2018, juvenile arrests declined 60% (Puzzanchera, 2020). Between 2014 and 2018, U.S. nationwide statistics showed a decline in violent offenses of 11% but a 21.0% increase for murder arrests (Puzzanchera, 2020). During this same period U.S. nationwide data indicated 125,030 arrests for simple assault by juveniles, and juvenile girls accounted for 37.0% of simple assault arrests. Overall, girls accounted for 30.0% of all juvenile arrests in 2018, and female juvenile offenders under the age of 17 accounted for 39.0% of larceny and theft arrests and 36.0% for all disorderly conduct arrests (Puzzanchera, 2020). Although, arrests of juvenile girls decreased in most offense categories during 2009 and 2018, arrest rates for violent crimes and aggravated arrest rates increased 21.0% and 28.0%, respectively (Puzzanchera, 2020).

Racial and gender disparity and disproportionate minority contact persist throughout the juvenile justice system and the child welfare system. This disparity in juvenile Black to White arrest rates is represented in all offenses between 2006 and 2019 (Ehrmann et al., 2019; Hockenberry, 2022; Puzzanchera, 2020; Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2018). For example, nationally in 2018, Black youth represented 16.0% of the juvenile population, yet accounted for 50.0% of all juvenile violent crimes arrest; White youth represented 75.0% of the juvenile population and only accounted for 47.0% of all juvenile violent crimes arrest (Puzzanchera, 2020). Between 2009 and 2018, arrest rates among juvenile girls decreased in most offense categories and were lower than rates

among boys (Hockenberry, 2022; Puzzanchera, 2020). Despite the U.S. nationwide decline in juvenile arrests, minority boys and girls continue to be disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system. Exposure to trauma and other characteristics, such as gender, race, and substitute care placement, have an effect of youth crossing over from child welfare to juvenile justice. Statistics suggest that youth involved in the juvenile justice system are likely to cross over into the child welfare system and vice versa (Gjertson & Gultinan, 2018; Ryan & Testa, 2005; Ryan et al., 2007).

Racial and gender disparities exist at every stage of the juvenile justice system and the child welfare system and seem to continue as youth become more involved in both systems. Youth of color experience a higher arrest rate for all offenses than White youth do, and there is an overrepresentation of minority youth in the child welfare system. According to Durbin (2021), Black parents are disproportionately policed by the child welfare system. Black families are twice as likely to be investigated for child abuse, and Black children are more than 2.5 times as likely to be taken into protective custody (Durbin, 2021). Compared to other children, African American children experience a greater length of time in foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021a). Minority youth involved in the child welfare system are more than two times more likely than White youth to be involved in the juvenile justice system (Puzzanchera, 2020). In 2017, 43,580 juvenile offenders were placed in public and private juvenile facilities (Hockenberry, 2020).

Gender differences also occur in placement. In 2017, girls accounted for 15% of the placement population and at a younger age than boys. Although, juvenile boys

outnumbered girls in placement between 1997 and 2017, their numbers decreased at a faster rate than girls during the same period (Hockenberry, 2020). In addition, Black youth accounted for 38% to 42% of the placement population, 1997–2017, whereas White youth placement decreased 64% (Hockenberry, 2020). Across the same years, the number of juvenile offenders in placement decreased for all demographic groups (Hockenberry, 2020).

Statistics from 2015 showed few female delinquency cases resulted in detention or formal sanctions, and of the 244,000 delinquency cases involving juvenile girls, more than 53.0% were handled informally and 21.0% of adjudicated delinquency cases resulted in out-of-home placement (Hockenberry, 2020). Between 1997 and 2017, Black girls accounted for 15.0% of female youth population, yet they represented more than 35% of delinquency cases (Hockenberry, 2020). Furthermore, girls represented 39% of petitioned status cases and accounted for 67% of truancy cases and 61% of runaway cases. Of the adjudicated cases, 6% resulted in out-of-home placement (Hockenberry, 2020).

Across the nation, as juvenile girls' involvement in the juvenile justice system increases, so does their involvement in the child welfare system, especially in out-of-home substitute care decisions and placements (Cenat et al., 2021). Although 189,113 girls are in foster care nationwide, with Black girls representing 57.0%, gender-specific data are limited (Patrick & Chaudhry, 2017). Factors that lead to involvement in the child welfare system frequently coincide and contribute with those factors that bring the youth to the attention of the juvenile justice system (Asscher et al., 2015; Ehrmann et al., 2019).

The link between child abuse and neglect, criminal behavior, and risk of delinquency is well-established (Cenat et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2011; Watts, 2017). Further, girls involved in the juvenile justice system experience various adversities and have unique trauma responses that place them at a higher risk for entering the system (Ehrmann et al., 2019; Zahn et al., 2008a; Zahn et al., 2008b).

Among youth involved in the child welfare system minorities are overrepresented because of systemic discrimination and court bias that exacerbate disproportionate contact and risk for criminalization of this vulnerable population (Bilchik & Nash, 2008; Cenat et al., 2021; Nash & Bilchik, 2009; Simmons-Horton, 2021). Researchers have described the practices and policies of the child welfare system as the foster-care-to-prison pipeline (Anspach, 2018; Martin & Esenstad, 2015). The MacArthur Foundation's models for change report series in Illinois identified gaps in current data collection at key points in the child welfare and juvenile justice decision points. Some gaps were a result of a comprehensive data collection system (Ryan et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2014). Ryan et al. (2011) found an overrepresentation of African American children, reporting they were at an increased risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system. Additional data reviewed from Peoria, Illinois, indicated that arrests between 2001 and 2009 showed disproportionate minority contact; African American youth comprised 25% of the general population but accounted for 66% of juveniles in detention, 61% of juveniles on probation, and 72% of the child welfare population. In addition, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA, 2009) reported girls committed fewer crimes than

their male counterparts, yet girls made up the fastest growing segment of the nationwide juvenile justice system.

In addition to changing laws and shifting societal views, emotional, physiological, and psychological factors put girls at risk for delinquency. The overrepresentation and disproportionate representation of minority youth and girls further demonstrates the unique needs and vulnerability of dually involved youth. While clarity is required to gain a better understanding of the disparity, some practitioners have noted legislation enacted by individual states and relabeling of certain offenses (such as *simple assaults* to *aggravated assaults*) accounts for the increased arrest rates among youth (Zahn et al., 2008a). Zahn et al. (2008a) found changes in enforcement policies, not in female behavior, was responsible for increasing arrest numbers. Girls suffer because of a lack of community-based services and resources that address their unique needs related to teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, mental health, sexual exploitation, and maltreatment. The trauma of child abuse and neglect can manifest in inappropriate responses to stress and adversity maladaptive behaviors (Bergman, 2014; Taylor, 2014). Most state and county jurisdictions are structured to pursue distinctly different and often conflicting objectives. The child welfare system pursues child and youth safety, well-being, and permanency, whereas, the juvenile justice system pursues community safety, positive change for the youth, and youth accountability (Mertens & Blom, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the policies and decisions that result in out-of-home placement, the types of foster care placement selected, the time in foster care, and number of placement disruptions for dually involved girls. Research

studies and current literature that is focused specifically on dually involved girls are scarce and limited. There is a need for gender sensitive policies, processes, and procedures that account for girls' unique adversities, risk factors, and experiences that shape and influence their behaviors and decisions; their delinquent behaviors are not the same as those of dually involved boys (Flores et al., 2018; Gjertson & Gultinan, 2018; Martin & Esenstad, 2015; Sherman & Balck, 2015).

According to the 2008 Models for Change Girls Study Group (Ryan et al., 2011; Zahn et al., 2008b), findings confirmed the need to identify appropriate responses to conflict between girls and their families and for community support for the family and youth with access to family strengthening and mediation programs. The study also found that intervention, treatment programs, and appropriate risk assessment tools to address delinquency move toward success because they are facing maltreatment, victimization, exploitation, relationship, school failure, and mental health issues (Asscher et al., 2015; Maschi et al., 2008; McGregor & Devaney, 2020; Yu & Chan, 2019; Zahn et al., 2008b).

The juvenile justice system was created on the belief that youth are more amenable to rehabilitation and treatment (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). The Child Protective Services: A Guide for Caseworkers noted child welfare professionals agreed that a child-centered, family-focused and culturally responsive framework for child welfare practices would promote the best outcomes for children (DePanfilis, 2018). The Family First Prevention Service Act of 2018 provides states with financial relief as they development prevention focused infrastructure in preventing the unnecessary removal of children from their families and homes.

In order to address the barriers and adversities that dually involved girls experience and face within the juvenile justice system and child welfare system, there must be an understanding of gender-specific at-risk behaviors these girls encounter. This understanding can help identify the strengths and needs of both systems and how to improve them and develop a more collaborative partnership among the systems. Because of the diverse demographics of dually involved girls, this is needed to identify inequalities that might impact dually involved girls who are underrepresented and people of color. Overall, the goal of this study is to highlight and provide a better understanding of out-of-home placement decisions in relationship to factors within the child welfare system for dually involved girls.

Problem Statement

A significant body of research has documented the overrepresentation and disproportionality of racial minority children in the child welfare and juvenile justice system relative to their representation in the general U.S. population (Cenat et al., 2021; Cross, 1974; Gross, 2009; Miller & Stewart, 2020). Decades of child welfare and juvenile justice research has documented the connection between maltreatment, high risk, and delinquent behaviors involving Black girls in both systems and disparities in out-of-home placement (Durbin, 2021; Fratto, 2016; Hawk et al., 2020; Patrick & Chaudhry, 2017).

Many studies have also been conducted to examine child welfare involvement and the likelihood that maltreated youth will become involved in the juvenile justice system (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). Research has also noted that child abuse and neglect are strong indicators for delinquent behaviors. This also includes child welfare system

experiences, with particular attention to racial and gender differences, predictors for out-of-home care, and the impact of out-of-home placement on juvenile justice involvement (Goodkind et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2012).

Researchers have also explored the race and gender disparities of the dually involved population (Dierkhising et al., 2018; Parrish, 2020; Simmons-Horton, 2021). A disproportionately high number of dually involved youth are Black girls (Advocates for Children & Youth, 2014; Children's Defense Fund, 2020). Girls in the juvenile justice system are more likely to have experienced trauma and maltreatment (Bilchik & Nash, 2008). Black girls were often considered high risk based on history and continued experiences of economic and social oppression (Anderson, 2020). Furthermore, this population experienced negative outcomes of juvenile justice involvement and challenges across life including academic achievement, life goals, family, and community attachment (Goodkind et al., 2013).

Racial disparities also occur at almost all major decision-making points in the child welfare system. African American families are overrepresented in suspected child abuse and neglect reports and have a higher rate of child protective investigations than other families; further, minority children have a higher risk of being placed in out-of-home care as a likely result (Edwards et al., 2021; Krase, 2013). Researchers have documented the existence of disparities across key decision points, including maltreatment reports and out-of-home placement, yet they have been less successful in identifying the factors behind the disparities. Determining the source of disparities at decision-making points is essential to understanding and addressing the

overrepresentation of Black girls and the effect of racial bias on decision making, which remains an important consideration in understanding the overrepresentation of Black girls in the data (Dettlaff et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, few studies have been conducted to explore child welfare system out-of-home placement decision-making policies (Daughtery, 2011; Font et al., 2012). The decision-making process for out-of-home placement is based on the best interest of the child (Chor et al., 2013; Cuccaro-Alamin et al., 2017), and as such, child welfare decision-making practices directly affected the safety and well-being of youth in care. Decision making is the process of selecting the best option out of a menu of possibilities. Researchers have examined factors associated with work decisions and process to gain knowledge on optimal decision making (Damman et al., 2020), yet little is known about the process of placement decision making. Recent research suggests complex placement decisions are influenced by a variety of factors, including agency, geography, caseworker attributes, and family demographics (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2015; Maguire-Jack et al., 2020).

In this research, I explored and investigated the problem of out-of-home placement decision-making processes from the perspectives of child welfare professionals and how they address and overcome systemic barriers of out-of-home placement, length of time in out-of-home placement, multiple placement and school disruptions, and geographical location of out-of-home placement among dually involved African American girls. African American girls involved in child welfare and juvenile justice systems experience racial and gender disparities. Making effective out-of-home

placement is important and influences the developmental processes of those who are already members of a vulnerable population (Onyeka-Crawford et al., 2017; Patrick & Chaudhry, 2017). While the number of African American girls involved in both systems increases, there is a need to understand and address the disparities in the decision-making process (Children's Bureau, 2016; Dettlaff et al., 2015).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the substitute care decision-making process from the perspectives of child welfare professionals and factors that contribute to the final decision. I explored and described the practices and policies that child welfare professionals use to reach their out-of-home placement decisions in general and at specific decision-making points along the child welfare continuum. The perceptions and perspectives of child welfare professionals regarding how they came to decisions related to race and to what extent race, gender, and location relate to placement decisions could also be factors. The child welfare professionals' experiences, tenure, traditions, and knowledge play a role in placement for dually involved African American girls. Further, I sought to discover whether participants assign certain qualities to Black girls different from those for White girls in placement decisions.

With disparities occurring at major decision-making points along the child welfare continuum, I explored the impact of various factors—implicit, adultification, and historical bias; characteristics of the child welfare system; emotions and subjective processes of the family; caseworker, agency, community, and human decision making—

on the decision-making process and the ultimate outcomes realized from the decisions. I explored and documented personal characteristics or implicit biases that influenced the out-of-home placement decision process and the perceptions or assumptions of the child welfare professional that impacted their decision-making process, including the way different levels of the child welfare continuum intersect with each other in the decision-making process. This study addresses a gap in the research and could help other child welfare professionals and agencies develop better decision-making policies and practices for out-of-home placement care decisions, by addressing the disparities along the decision-making continuum and race and gender related challenges. The shared experiences and knowledge of child welfare service workers provide vital information and knowledge for child welfare system administrators.

Research Questions

The research was informed by the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the perspectives of child welfare professionals on the out-of-home placement decision-making process?

RQ2: What challenges, barriers, and strategies are faced by child welfare professionals in making out-of-home placement decisions?

RQ3: What strategies and changes do child welfare professionals engage to reduce and overcome possible racial and gender bias to ensure effective placement decision making?

Theoretical Framework

This research study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1974, 1979a) ecological systems theory, which focuses on how a child's development is affected by their environment and social relationships. This theoretical framework of child development allows for the exploration of the institution of child protective custody, the state's perspective, and professional caseworkers' decisions for how substitute care impacts a child's development. Bronfenbrenner's (1974, 1979a) ecological systems theory is suited for this research study as it highlights the developmental process and how the environment influences a child's development. The unit of analysis for this study were child welfare professionals' perspectives of their decisions related to individual placement of youth in home or out of home.

Caseworkers' decisions and perspectives impact out-of-home placement decisions, location, and length of stay, which ultimately affect a child's development. The structural policy constraints impact the environment where a caseworker places the youth. The placement location or environment also has an impact on the youth's development. Caseworkers speak to the environment and the importance of the environment to a youth's development. Ecology systems theory suggests that if a youth's relations with the immediate family are not established, the youth will lack the necessary tools to explore other parts of their environment and surroundings, which can lead to additional or even amplified delinquent behaviors (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979a).

Previous research supports Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as it relates to numerous factors affecting female youth risks of juvenile delinquency

(Javadani & Allen, 2014). The ecological systems theory can be defined within the setting of youth in substitute care as it applies to their type of placement, length of time in placement, and placement disruptions (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2015; Font et al., 2012; Maguire-Jack et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2018). The ecological systems theory incorporates the elements of this study and has the potential to lead to a better understanding of African American girls' path through the juvenile justice system and the child welfare system. According to Bronfenbrenner (1974, 1979a, 1979b), not only do these systems affect youth, but the characteristics of the youth's gender, ethnicity, and values also influence their experiences of the systems.

Decision making in child welfare systems depends largely on the personal judgments of child welfare professionals, judges, and others. Child welfare professionals are influenced by external factors that vary over time and from past placement experiences. Scant literature is available regarding child welfare professionals' decision-making processes (Cuccaro-Alamin, et al., 2017; Dettlaff, et al., 2015; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2015; Font et al., 2012; Maguire-Jack et al., 2020).

Nature of the Study

The nature of this phenomenological study was to provide an understanding of the placement decision-making process from the perspectives of child welfare professionals. Specifically, I sought to understand their decisions regarding out-of-home placement and substitute care decisions for dually involved African American girls. Data were collected for analysis through semistructured interviews and questions guided the interview process to gain the perspectives of child welfare professionals. Additional information regarding

implicit bias and systemic barriers to placement was revealed and captured through the interview process, as informed by the research questions.

I chose a qualitative approach to gain a rich description of the challenges, perceptions, and perspectives of the child welfare professionals. This approach differs from previous research on African American youth derived mostly from quantitative data that exacerbates the demonstrated overrepresentation and disproportionate features of the current realities. Further, qualitative research is needed to provide the human quality, lived experiences, and subjective perceptions of childcare professionals who make decisions for placement to improve both administrative systems. This qualitative study provides a voice and a more descriptive viewpoint needed from professionals who provide day-to-day interaction with youth and are in the most influential position to improve the system and outcomes.

Semistructured interview questions provided participants the opportunity to address their concerns and explain their perspectives of policy and practice for out-of-home placement decisions. Scheduled interviews included the following: discussion of consent; protocol for addressing any needs, concerns, barriers, confidentiality, and privacy issues; and discussion about anonymity and pseudonyms. The benefit of the information gathered from the semistructured interview questions increased the awareness and urgency for policy reform and additional cultural awareness and education to improve the child welfare system and the decisions made within the system.

The recruitment process for participants included Illinois child welfare system professionals who were actively involved with dually involved girls. Obtaining a sample

of dually involved Black girls was rejected as unfeasible and inappropriate due to their status as a vulnerable population. In addition, maintaining youth confidentiality and privacy concerns, there was the practical barrier of who had custody and guardianship and the legal authority to grant permission to participate in research studies. Therefore, the sample size of this research study was 11 child welfare professionals. I sought to collect information until reaching data saturation. Participation criteria were that they were a child welfare professional (placement service worker, case worker, supervisor) of youth placed in out-of-home environment, substitute care, foster care, or residential facility and had decision-making capacities.

Some recruitment concerns emerged from this population due to professional obligations and agency mandates. Support for participant engagement was sought through networking and professional connections and due diligence was taken to protect and respect professional boundaries. Before data collection, I developed a preliminary coding framework based on the theoretical framework of this study explained in detail in Chapter 3. Interview transcripts were reviewed for emerging themes. Analyzing qualitative interviews includes the following: (a) inductive methods of analyzing interview transcripts, (b) deductive approach to qualitative analysis, (c) collective feedback for qualitative research, (d) organizing research recordings, (e) transcribe all the interviews, (f) read the transcripts, and (g) annotate the transcripts. Although, data analysis can be completed manually, I used NVivo data analysis software to code the themes and analyze the data after the data collection interviewing process was completed.

Definitions

The following are definitions for key concepts of this study:

Adultification bias: The unconscious ways that African American girls are viewed as older and more culpable than White girls, which effectively reduces or removes the consideration of childhood as a mediating factor in Black youth behavior. The extent of race and gender together influence the perception of Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their White peers (Epstein et al., 2017; Killeen, 2019).

African American or Black: Includes all individuals who identify with one or more nationalities or ethnic groups originating in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census, 2020).

Child welfare continuum: Supporting children and youth in foster care using most ongoing appropriate and least restrictive interventions and care services from entry to exit of the child welfare system while ensuring safety needs are addressed (Child Welfare Information Gateway).

Crossover youth: Youth who encounter the juvenile justice and child welfare systems or maltreated children who go on to show delinquency (Herz et al., 2019). They may occupy either system at different times and different points, and their status may or may not be known to either system. Crossover youth may or may not have an investigation or involvement in one or both public systems (Herz, et al., 2019).

Disparity: The unequal treatment, services, resources, and decision points found when comparing an ethnic/racial minority to a non-minority (Child Welfare Information Gateway (2021a).

Disproportionality: The overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a racial/ethnic group in the child welfare system (Child Welfare Information Gateway (2021a).

Dual contact: Crossover youth who have touched both juvenile justice and child welfare systems but not at the same time (Herz et al., 2019).

Dually adjudicated: Youth who have formal involvement with the court in both systems with sustained dependency allegation in the child welfare system and have been adjudicated by the juvenile justice system (Herz et al., 2019).

Dually identified: Youth who are currently involved in the juvenile justice system and have a history of involvement with the child welfare system but do not have a current open child welfare case (Tuell et al., 2021).

Dually involved: Crossover youth who are concurrently involved in both the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system (Herz et al., 2019).

Dual status: Youth who have come into contact with both the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system. They enter the systems at different ages, through different pathways and have different levels of involvement in each system (Tuell et al., 2021).

Ethnic identity: Ethnicity to which individuals believe themselves to be included and recognized as part of. The central defining characteristic of many individuals, culture, religion, geography, language, and practices shared by individuals connected by kinship and loyalty; an individual's self-concept gained through knowledge of

membership, value, and emotional significance attached to a social group (Mims & Williams, 2020; Phinney, 1990).

Exosystem: Elements of an environment that have a profound influence on a person's development even though that individual is not directly involved with that environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Fictive kin Placement: Any individual, whether related or unrelated by birth or marriage, who is shown to have close personal or emotional ties with a child or the child's family prior to the child's placement with the individual (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2019).

Foster care/substitute care: Twenty-four-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or legal guardians, including group homes and institutions, where the state or private agency has placement and care responsibility; temporary placements to ensure child/youth safety under Rule 301.90 (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2019).

Foster youth: Children or youth who have been placed under the care or custody of the child welfare system (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2019).

Individual racial bias: Positive or negative attitude, assumption, or judgment of any particular racial or cultural group that affects child welfare decision-making practices and policies (DeNard et al., 2017).

Macrosystem: The cultural environment a child resides in (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Multiple placement/placement disruption: Youth who are moved from various foster care placement settings due to unplanned or emergency circumstances, resulting in the youth being placed in another foster home, shelter, residential facility (Rule 301; Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2019).

Out-of-home placement: Placement of a youth outside the biological or legal guardian/caregiver, which includes relative/non-relative/kinship/fictive kin foster homes, therapeutic foster homes, emergency shelters, group homes, and residential treatment centers (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2019).

Placement decision: Placement or substitute care of children whom the department is legally responsible for who require a living arrangement away from their families due to abuse, neglect, or dependency. The department has determined it is in the best interest of the child that family preservation services would not protect the child from imminent risk of harm (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2019).

Racial disproportionality: The uneven ratio of a particular ethnic group relative to that group's presence in the overall population. The overrepresentation of a racial or ethnic population when compared to their representation in the general population.

Removal and removal decision: The department may move a child to another placement based on consideration of the safety and well-being of the child (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2019, p. 21[O]).

Truant and truancy: A child who is subject to compulsory school attendance and has absence without valid cause. The number of unexcused absences varies from state to state to trigger a charge of truancy (Illinois General Assembly, 105 ILCS 5/26-2a).

Youth: A young person between ages 15 and 24 (Illinois General Assembly, 225 ILCS 10/2.01).

Assumptions

Assumptions were part of this research as there were certain aspects out of my control that were needed to make the study relevant and necessary. Assumptions and other factors can influence a study, and a researcher has no control over these and has no hard data on them. For example, I assumed that participants involved in the study would participate in an open and honest manner, have insight into the matter, and answer the interview questions to the best of their ability and with professional knowledge and experience. I was exploring the decision-making process from the child welfare professionals' perspectives with integrity and without inherent bias. Because it would take a considerable amount of time to validate each answer, researchers must assume participants are being honest. Another assumption when conducting a study on African American dually involved girls is an underlying assumption that this phenomenon is important to the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Another underlying assumption is that African American dually involved girls are overrepresented in the child welfare system and are targeted for hypervigilance and scrutiny. Further, there was an assumption that adultification or implicit bias are factors in a caseworker's decision for out-of-home placement and location of foster care. Lastly, addressing Bronfenbrenner's (1974, 1979a) ecological systems theory, I assumed that environmental instability for foster care youth places them at an increased risk of delinquency and delinquent behavior. The working premise of both the social justice and social service

field is that African American youth are overrepresented and have disproportionate contact with authority figures.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study refers to the parameters under which the study is operating and the problem the study seeks to address (Simon & Goes, 2013). I ensured that participants met the criteria as related to Bronfenbrenner's (1979a) ecological systems theory. The scope of this research study was to explore the out-of-home placement of dually involved Black girls and to provide information for system improvement and policy reform. Bronfenbrenner (1979a) developed the human ecological systems theory to explain how systemic mechanisms impact an individual's development and their upward social capabilities.

The number of African American youth in foster care makes ethnic identity issues important (Schwartz, 2007). A youth's ethnic identity impacts their ability to understand their place in society and what constitutes a healthy sense of self. Foster care impacts ethnic identity development among Black female youth while in foster care as an adolescent (Daughtery, 2011). The ethnic identity development process among minority youth requires resolving conflicts between dominant culture and minority culture (Schwartz, 2007). Black youth consider the meaning of their race while simultaneously negotiating social challenges and understanding belonging to a racial group (Derlan & Umana-Taylor, 2015; Mims & Williams, 2020). Minority youth explore and develop their identity, and a Black youth's sense of ethnic identity is more likely to be maintained when placed with family members versus strangers (Schwartz, 2007). Scholars suggest

that a Black female youth's identity may be a multidimensional construct (Daughtery, 2011). Black female youth socialization cultural dissonance is a core dilemma. Black female youth perceive they are devalued and belong to a social group devalued by race and gender (Daughtery, 2011).

There was a need for research to gather information about affects and impacts of out-of-home placements and length-of-time in out-of-home placement, including the barriers that exist in the system related to permanency and social community connections. Feedback and suggestions are needed by those directly involved to address the need for system reform and improvement. Although foster care representation dropped significantly over the past decade in the United States, there remains a significant difference between placement rates of minority children and nonminority children. African American children are twice as likely as White children to enter the foster care system. Furthermore, gender and racial disparity worsen as the youth becomes more involved in public systems.

Limitations

Limitations of a study are constraints beyond a researcher's control and could affect the study outcome. Characteristics arise from limitations in the scope of the research and because of the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions through the research plan development (Simon & Goes, 2013). The findings of this research study may not be applicable to nationwide policies in the United States for child welfare systems or juvenile court systems; however, the findings might suggest more research is

needed to address the disproportionate contact and overrepresentation of African American youth dually involved in both child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Finding an interview site that provides a safe environment where participants are comfortable and not vulnerable while also ensuring confidentiality and privacy might present challenges. Because of organization policies, I might have experienced challenges in finding and accessing participants from state and nonprofit child welfare agencies. As a result, I might have needed to collect information from other data sources that could have raised validity and reliability concerns. Practical limitations could impact this study, such as time, money, and accessibility (Simon & Goes, 2013). My personal and professional beliefs and experiences could potentially influence the study outcomes, but I sought to remain impartial, objective, unbiased, and open-minded during the interview process and throughout analysis and drawing study conclusions and recommendations.

Significance

Regardless of what theory explains the overrepresentation and disparities that dually involved Black girls experience in the child welfare system, a clear understanding of decision-making processes used by child welfare officials is necessary to address the situation effectively and efficiently. I explored the out-of-home placement decisions and the developmental impact through child welfare professionals' perspectives and viewpoints regarding dually involved Black female youth. The outcomes of this study may increase awareness about the overrepresentation and disproportionate contact of African American youth in a dually involved system and the key elements of decision making that create that environmental condition for youth.

In addition, this study has the potential to improve cultural and ethnic pathways and address the systemic barriers of child welfare systems based on participants' knowledge, experiences, and recommendations. This could help policy makers improve the out-of-home placement system and its responses and engagement with African American girls. This research can initiate and continue a discussion among policy makers about the disproportionate contact and may lead to appropriate policy reforms and services. A goal of this study was to initiate discussions about hypervigilance, behavior expectations, ethnic identity, implicit and explicit bias, adultification, and the importance of culture and communities among social service professionals.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I identified the problem regarding the focus on dually involved African American girls and the limited research regarding this population and their pathways of becoming dually involved or crossing over from child welfare to juvenile justice. The purpose of this study was to explore child welfare professionals' and caseworkers' perspectives of their decision-making processes for out-of-home placements, the length of time in out-of-home placement, multiple placements, placement disruptions, location of placement, and impact of that decision on the development of dually involved African American female youth. Chapter 1 included an introduction of the theoretical framework, definitions of terms, identified assumptions, and a brief discussion on the limitations and scope and delimitations of the research.

In Chapter 2, I discuss and analyze Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and review past and current literature themes that included dually involved African

American girls in out-of-home placement foster care, their overrepresentation in foster care, their disproportional contact with juvenile justice system, length of time in substitute care, and the different types of out-of-home placement, placement disruptions, and location of placement factors. In Chapter 3, I focus on the research methodology and research procedures used in this study. Also in Chapter 3 are the research design, the interview questions, interview process and setting, interview population, data collection and procedures, data analysis, validity, reliability, instrumentation, ethical considerations and expected findings. In Chapter 4, I provide the results from this research study and demonstrate the study's trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In Chapter 5, I present an interpretation of the overall findings, limitations, recommendations for further research, implications for positive social change, and the study's conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presented a review and summary of the current literature that was foundation of this study. Youth who entered the child welfare system have experienced adverse traumatic events and complex trauma: child abuse, neglect, mental health concerns, maltreatment, maladaptation, risky behaviors, and juvenile delinquency. This literature review included an in-depth look at dually involved Black girls, out-of-home placement, substitute care, length of out-of-home placement, location, juvenile delinquency, decision-making processes, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which focused on interactions between individuals and their environment.

The disproportionate representation and overrepresentation of Black youth in the child welfare system and juvenile justice system is well documented and has been researched and reported for over 40 years (Cutuli et al., 2016; Puzanchera, 2019). The issues concerning girls in the public system was brought forth as early as the 1960s by Gisela Konopka. In the early 1970s, Andra Cross explored treatment programs for Black youth. This issue continues to be a concern for public systems and society more than 40 years later.

Black girls experienced high amounts of traumatic experiences of violence, abuse, and gendered racism (Anderson, 2020; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Patrick & Chaudhry, 2017; Wun, 2016). Black girls in foster care experienced placement and school disruptions that impacted their ability to stay in school (Patrick & Chaudhry, 2017). Anderson (2020) wrote that Black girls were three times more likely to experience discipline referrals,

suspensions, and expulsions than White girls, which contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline. Black girls were criminalized by police and public systems and were subject to criminalization by the foster care system and school system (Wun, 2016). Scholars have noted that school discipline policies overpolice and oversurveil Black female students (Wun, 2016). A considerable amount of violence that threatened Black girls has been linked to punitive school policies and practices (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Exclusion from school activities resulted in higher rates of truancy and dropout, higher rates of contact with the juvenile justice system and lower academic achievement.

In this study, I sought to explore the child welfare professionals' decision-making processes and their perspective of the impact their decisions on dually involved girls' development and whether their decisions considered the youth's new environment and interactions. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory brought attention to the affect an environment had on a youth's development and the effect a youth had on their environment. In this chapter, I reviewed the literature search strategy. Next, I presented a review of the literature regarding the theoretical framework. The final section of the chapter included a review of key variables and studies.

Literature Search Strategy

Literature for this study was obtained through online databases; articles were retrieved from the following databases: Walden University Library, EBSCO Host, Academic Search Premier, SAGE Publications, SocIndex with full text, Juvenile Justice Databases, Human Development and Family Science, Public Policy Administration databases, JSTOR, MDPI, Administration Policy Mental Health, Social, Behavioral and

Psychological Databases and Educational Resources Information Center, PsychArticles, Elsevier, and text books used throughout my educational process. Google Scholar searches provided scholarly peer-reviewed article references to related topics. Articles were searched using select keywords. The following terms were used and combined to retrieve articles: *juvenile delinquency, delinquent girls, delinquent Black girls, child welfare system, juvenile justice system, foster care, arrest rates, substitute care, residential placement of juvenile delinquents, residential placement and juvenile girls, judicial bias and juvenile justice and child welfare system, crossover youth, dually involved youth, dually involved Black girls, dually involved girls and out-of-home placement, risk factors, trauma, race, placement, disproportionate contact, identity and delinquency, implicit bias, minority and child welfare system, race disparity, ethnicity disparity, juvenile crime and foster care, out-of-home placement decisions, development and juvenile delinquency and child welfare system, juvenile girls, disproportionality and dually involved girls, racial disproportionality, overrepresentation of Black girls, identity development, decision-making process and child welfare system, stereotypes, and adultification*. Duplicates were eliminated and references within articles' reference lists were explored to search for other relevant studies.

Theoretical Foundation

The theory of ecological systems developed from Bronfenbrenner's (1979a; 1979b) ecology of human development originally was developed to explain research in human development. This theory was used to explain the developing person, the environment, and the evolving interaction between the two (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a, p. 3).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979a; 1979b), the ecological environment is a set of nested structures. The ecological environment extend beyond the immediate situation, the behavior of the individual, and affect the development of the person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 7). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) there are five systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights the interrelations among environmental and personal factors and the multiple levels of analysis that shape human behavior from individual biology to proximal social environments. This ecological system suggests a child's environment impacts and affects how a child develops and grows and how the child affects their environment. This suggests that each system or event affects the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hong et al., 2011). This perspective acknowledges and explains how each system is mutually influential with continual interaction, building and shaping the event or situation that a child's inherent quality and environment interacts to influence how they mature and develop. Bronfenbrenner (1974; 1979a; 1979b, 2000) noted each system nests in the other from the innermost level, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, to the outermost level chronosystem.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979a), at the microsystem level, a child has the most direct contact and engages in face-to-face interactions. The microsystem involves the closest and most direct personal contact, relationships, and interactions with their most immediate environment and surroundings, including daily home, living situation

and environment, peer group, school, community, neighborhood, caregivers, parents, schoolteachers, and siblings (Berk, 1971; Bronfenbrenner, 1979a; Luke & Goodrich, 2015). At the microsystem level, interactions and relationships are transactional, both away from and toward the youth. Bronfenbrenner (1974, 1979a) identified this as bidirectional influences. Bronfenbrenner also noted these bidirectional influences occur at all levels. At this level, a youth is impacted by the degree of interactions and relationships. These individuals are regularly involved and part of the proximal processes in the youth's life, suggesting that the more positive, encouraging, and nurturing interactions a youth receives, the better the youth is able to develop and attach. Proximal processes are identified by those a youth has regular interaction with such as the caregiver, parent, foster parent, social worker, or probation officer.

Bronfenbrenner (1974b, 1979a) posed that development evolves from a variety of individual and environmental interrelations. Developmental growth in social skills, academic functioning, and mental ability stems from the proximal processes, which have a tremendous influence on a youth's development when the environments are stable and positive (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a). However, when the environments are negative, unstable, and disadvantageous, the same degree of proximal processes are insufficient to for the same outcome (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a; Wang et al., 2019). In adverse environments, caregivers, foster parents, and parents use more time and effort to achieve the same level of success and positive growth for a youth (Wang et al., 2019). Therefore, the interactions within the youth's home and environment influence the interaction within

another environment, such as a neglectful or abusive home life negatively influencing a youth's school interaction, as described in the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a).

The exosystem is an extension of the mesosystem consisting of informal and formal social structures, such as local, county, state, and federal government departments and institutions, community, parent employment schedules, community-based resources, and informal social networks that do not involve the developing youth. However, these social structures influence and impact what occurs in a youth's life and with the youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a). At the exosystem level, multiple settings interact that do not directly affect the youth nor does the youth directly affect the settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a). Although, a youth does not directly interact and is not directly involved, the youth does feel the positive or negative force involved with the interaction with their own system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a, 1979b). At this level, the interactions between the youth and environment that are not regular interactions but indirectly impact the youth are distal proximal processes.

The interactions between the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, and the minority community are a distal proximal process (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a, 1979b). Other distal risk factors include family economic hardships, neighborhood threats, and intensity of negative life events (Krishnakumar & Black, 2002). The distal processes from the social environment may affect the proximal process (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). For example, the unwillingness or lack of a substitute care environment for a juvenile delinquent may impact the placement decision-making process of a juvenile court judge.

The macrosystem is comprised of cultural values and social customs, cultural policies, and laws that affect a youth's growth on multiple levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a). Through the macrosystem is the impact on broader society on how a youth views themselves and how they function. The macrosystem can have a negative or positive influence on a youth's life. For example, children exposed to war, terrorism, and community violence experience a different type of development than children in peaceful environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Through this layer, cultural development will occur, including the youth's cultural patterns and values, their dominant beliefs and ideas, and their political and economic system. The ideological concept is reenforced through traditions and cultural norms (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The macrosystem impacts how the microsystem functions through policies, race, and ethnicity. Evidence of the effect of this macrosystem on development is demonstrated through the understanding of racial tension—the conflicting cultural thoughts, and practices, such as religious beliefs, practices, discipline and family interactions between minority and dominant groups that become interracial misunderstandings (Prather et al., 2016).

The child welfare system and juvenile justice system have been criticized by possessing institutional and structured racism and prejudicial with minority families and low socioeconomic families (Durbin, 2021). Researchers have shown more White girls were involved in criminal behavior and delinquency than minority girls (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004); minority girls were adjudicated more than White girls (Kaba, 2014; McCoy & Pearson, 2019; Modrowski et al., 2021; Puzanchera, 2020).

Researchers have also explored the disproportionate contact and overrepresentation of African American girls in foster care (Coulton et al., 2015; Kaba, 2014; Marshall & Haight, 2014; McCoy & Pearson, 2019). Black girls are often perceived as hyper sexed, de-sexed and hyper masculinized offenders (Dorsey & Williams-Butler, 2021; Goff et al., 2014; Luke, 2008). Black girls were described as violent, masculine in nature and behavior and less feminine than White girls (Hurst et al., 2005; Luke, 2008). Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2004) proposed if doing delinquency or doing violence is doing masculinity, then Black girls doing violence does not present a challenge to traditional theories of crime, violence or delinquency since doing masculinity is part of the mainstream cultural construction of Black femininity.

Scelfo's (2005) Newsweek article emphasized the increase in violent crimes committed by juvenile girls over the past two decades and increased the general public's awareness and fear of juvenile girls. Scelfo's article described the increase in violent crimes and criminal offenses committed by adolescent girls as a burgeoning national crisis of increasing violent behavior in adolescent girls. Traditional media and social media platforms have described delinquent behaviors by minority girls as violent crimes and gang beatings further increasing the general public's fear, concern, and awareness of minority girls' delinquent behaviors (Epstein et al., 2017; Gilmore & Bettis, 2021; Miller & Stewart, 2020). Few media stories discussed the traumatization and systematic failures of Black girls by child welfare system and the police (Freeman, 2021). Black girls are often described as angry, aggressive, less innocent, and more adult-like; they are perceived to be older, and their ages are often misperceived by adults and authority

figures (Epstein et al., 2017; Gilmore & Bettis, 2021). Researchers have explored the adultification experience of Black girls (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021). Blake and Epstein (2019) noted the adultification of Black girls was associated with punitive treatment.

Research on the juvenile justice system indicated a gender bias and double standard; laws for delinquent girls are punitive and disproportionate to delinquent boys. Delinquent girls received harsher punishments, sentences and longer institutional detainment than delinquent boys (Ehrmann et al., 2019; Flores et al., 2018). Chavez-Garcia (2009) wrote African American girls received harsher sentences and had a higher rate of detention and placements. Research studies indicated child welfare interventions cause irreparable harm to Black girls (Dettlaff et al., 2020). Researchers found girls' pathways to delinquency were influenced by people and juvenile justice system through the implementation of policies and practices that impact girls differently than boys (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Patino Lydia & Moore, 2015). Research studies have shown that the majority of youth in the foster care system are from lower socioeconomic families and minority families (Dixon, 2008). Researchers found delinquent youth from poor families were least likely to have sufficient legal counsel for representation or to have an adult family member present (Miller et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2013; Simmons-Horton, 2021).

According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979a) ecological systems theory, predictors of a child's development, socialization and moral character outcomes result from their interactions within their environment. Children who experience disruptive environments and instability through the ecological layers experience behavioral and emotional

problems (Parrish, 2020). Bronfenbrenner's theory suggested each individual and all their context exist within and are influenced by a larger community cultural which is key to a child's development is stability and consistency.

Proximal processes influence the development processes of systematic interaction between the child and their caregiver. The caregiver can be the natural parent, traditional or non-traditional foster parents, teachers, counselors, or grandparents (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Multiple placements can be linked to the mesosystem since the child's interactions within their environment may impact their interactions in another environment. Multiple and frequent moves from out-of-home, foster care, and substitute placements, schools, and communities have a negative affect and impact on children in the child welfare system; which lessens their ability to create strong social connections, family connections, ethnic identity, and create a support system (Flores et al., 2018; Schwartz, 2007). Researchers found at the time of their first arrest, dually involved girls experienced multiple placement disruptions and placement moves in the child welfare system (Cutuli et al., 2016; Goodkind et al., 2013).

In the mesosystem encompassed the interactions between the youth and their parents and teachers. The youth's individual microsystem does not function independently. This interaction between the youth and their environment was effective both ways, the youth influenced their environment and their environment influenced them. Understanding that numerous factors and people in different interactions relationships, roles, and actions impacted the process (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b; Marshall

& Haight, 2014). Bronfenbrenner's theory rests on human development and describes socialization as the way of becoming a member of society.

This study focused specifically on the mesosystem level (out-of-home placement) and exosystem (involvement of child welfare professionals), which included the perspective of the child welfare professional and the deeper involvement from the child welfare system that influenced dually involved girls' development.

Research indicated when controlling for socioeconomic effects of poverty and other factors, race was not a factor in the decision-making process by child welfare professionals for out-of-home placement (Cenat et al., 2021; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; Pryce et al., 2019). Discrimination, racial bias, and cultural misunderstanding between Black youth, their natural families, and child welfare decision-makers are other factors which contributed to Black youth entering the foster care system (Daughtery 2011; Gilmore & Bettis, 2021). Adultification also impacted the child welfare system in their efforts to manage, protect, nurture, and interact with Black girls. Child welfare professionals perceived Black girls as more independent and less in need of protection or nurturing and based out-of-placement decisions on that perception (Killeen, 2019; Miller & Steward, 2020; Simmons-Horton, 2021).

A study conducted by Georgetown Law Center on Poverty (2019) found that adults viewed Black girls as more adult-like and less innocent than their White peers. Study results found adults perceived that Black girls needed less nurturing, less protection, less support, and comfort than other girls. Black girls were perceived to be more independent and more knowledgeable about adult topics and sex than White girls.

These findings revealed a contributing factor for the disproportionate rates and disparate treatment of Black girls in the public system (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Killeen, 2019).

The stereotypical description of Black girls interpreted as loud, socially sophisticated, controlling, and perceived as a threat (Blake & Epstein, 2019; Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Davis, 2020). Outspoken Black girls were perceived as aggressive and dominating. This outspokenness was intended to be a protective factor. Blake & Epstein (2019) found that Black girls were taught by their parents to be strong as a protective means to thrive in society and succeed. Some studies suggested the adultification of Black girls in schools reflected similar inequities in other public systems (Parrish, 2020). Which rendered Black girls vulnerable to criminalization, overpoliced, underprotected, and differentiated in decision-making discretion by public system officials (Killeen, 2019).

African American youth recognized these disparities which resulted in their negative perceptions of the child welfare system, including their socialization experiences as a member of groups devalued by race, ethnicity, and gender (Daughtery, 2011). This then harmed the social relationships due to fears of child welfare, which in a lack of trust among neighbors, and harm to the child's social relationship due to constant movement and inability to form long-lasting relationships (Dettlaff et al., 2020). Researchers found identity development for African American youth took place within the context of the family (Daughtery, 2011). However, foster care environment had an impact on identity development for African American girls who were in foster care. The out-of-home

placement had a negative impact on identity development due to stigmatization, and devaluation of self (Daughtery, 2011).

Phinney (1990) explained ethnic identity as an important aspect of adolescence development. Minority youth began the identification process at an earlier age, which suggested a relationship existed between ethnic identity and self-esteem. The adolescent's culture was an important part of identity development (Phinney 1990; Phinney et al., 2001). Furthermore, Hurst et al. (2005) noted gender role socialization differed between White and Black girls, concluding Black girls' socialization resulted in a less stereotypical gender role than that of White girls.

Rather than associating the role of the woman in a feminine, supportive, nurturing role, African American girls were exposed to less traditional gender roles and qualities. They were encouraged to be self-sufficient, strong and resilient (Hurst et al., 2005). While forming a unique gender role, young African American girls also formed a self-identity shaped around race or society's perception of race (Blake & Epstein, 2019). Sadie A. Daniels (2016) article described her experiences as a Black female in foster care; the lack of ties and roots; the lack of knowledge about heritage and the damage to sense of self. As a Black girl in foster care, she hated her blackness as much as she hated being in foster care as both made her life harder.

According to Lee et al. (2011), ethnic identity development affected adolescents' perceptions and attitudes concerning legal authorities. Most African American female adolescent offenders' perceptions of fair treatment were based upon ethnic identity. Scholars suggested that African American girls' experienced real and perceived

devaluation based on gender and ethnicity, which suggested minority youth have negative views and experiences with justice system (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; Hurst et al., 2005). Equally, those youth recognized a bias against their ethnicity and in the case of female offenders, their gender (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Gilmore & Bettis, 2021).

During adolescence, the formation of identity was constantly fluid and tentative as teens struggled to define themselves as individuals. The formation of personal identity is linked to psychosocial development. High-risk youth sought an identity through negative peer interactions or risky behaviors. Another important component to the developmental process of adolescence was experimentation, which included criminal and other self-destructive behaviors (Scott & Steinberg, 2008).

While many children of color rarely ventured beyond their physical proximity, the ethnic density of their neighborhood was positively linked to their ethnic identity. Consequently, family became an integral socializing factor for an adolescent developing attitudes, values, and sense of self. Some developmental psychological scientists examined the parents' implicit beliefs about racial biases that were associated with a child's explicit beliefs and the impact their beliefs had on the child's developing attitudes toward other groups (Hewer, 2016). Children adopted racial attitudes and preferences from family, which propelled a child toward success or a conditioned downfall linked to familial attitudes and self-perceptions (Hewer, 2016).

Literature Review

The involvement in the child welfare services was challenging for any youth, African American youth involved with the public systems faced additional barriers with

understanding and the equity of services and resources (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2019). Black youth were disproportionate and overrepresented in the public systems (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2019). Established disparities in the juvenile justice system and child welfare system which disproportionately impacted dually involved Black girls and out-of-home placement decisions by child welfare professionals also contributed to their overrepresentation and development (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2019).

A literature review was presented in this chapter examining dually involved Black girls and their involvement in the child welfare system. Several themes surfaced in the review of the research literature, which demonstrated a connection between social factors, such as school, peers, placement, neighborhood, and the link between maltreatment and delinquency. Many scholars noted that dually involved youth faced numerous problems such as education, placement disruptions, substance abuse, mental health problems, and longer stay in the foster care system (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2019; Herz et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2008).

Researchers who explored the common link between victimization and delinquency suggested children who experienced child abuse, neglect, and trauma were more likely than children who did not to engage in risky delinquent behaviors through adolescence and into adulthood (Maschi et al., 2008). When maltreated and delinquent youth were in a stable placement and received a continuum of care, they were less likely to engage in delinquency which disrupted the link between delinquency and maltreatment (Wilkinson et al., 2019).

The child welfare system was developed to protect and nurture children, provide resources and services to families who required assistance with supervision and care of their children (Ringgold, et al., 2018). However, juvenile and social trends have shown Black youth represented a disproportionate number of adjudicated delinquency and child welfare cases that resulted in out-of-home placement and recidivism (Dunnville, 2000; Garcia & Puzzanchera, 2009; Lee, et al., 2011; Puzzanchera & Sickmund, 2008; Ryan & Joseph, 2011; Warren, 2000).

Although juvenile arrests and detentions decreased, the racial disparities continued across the various child welfare services. Dually involved Black youth were overrepresented with a criminalized rate of nearly twice that of non-minority youth (The Children's Defense Fund, 2020). The representation of African American youth in the child welfare services was double their American child population representation. African American youth represented a 2% dually involvement versus a 1.3% involvement by White youth (Children's Defense Fund, 2020; Herz & Dierkhising, 2019).

In 2018, Black children represented 23% of youth in foster care and 14% of the general youth population. Between 2009 and 2018 there was a 63% decrease in child arrest rates; 728,280 youth were arrested in the United States in 2018 (Children's Defense Fund, 2020); 43,580 racial minority youth & children were placed and held in a residential facility at a rate twice that of White children (Children's Defense Fund, 2020); racial minority youth were detained five times that of White children; 935 youth were incarcerated in adult prisons in 2017 (Children's Defense Fund, 2020). Racial minority

youth represented 67% of children in the juvenile justice system (Children's Defense Fund, 2020).

The state of Illinois had a 10-year period of no data on delinquency for out-of-home placed youth (Cross et al., 2020). The 2017 state of Illinois Study of Child Well-being report which encompassed ten years of data from the state of Illinois, reported African American children represented 15% of the U.S. population; 25% of the child protection investigations; 30% of indicated child protection investigations and 36% of out-of-home care (Cross et al., 2019). For many racial minority youth, the child welfare system presented a pathway to the juvenile justice system (Goodkind, et al., 2013).

The relationship between out-of-home placement and risk of delinquency for maltreated youth showed an increased likelihood to engage in delinquency (Goodkind et al., 2013). According to the Illinois 2017 study, adolescents who left foster care, over half had a history of arrest; one-quarter reported being convicted of a crime; one-third was detained overnight (Cross et al., 2020). Additional information found at the state level Black children were overrepresented 2.3 to 2.7 times their proportion in the Illinois children population. At the state level Black children in substitute care were 2.5 times their percentage within the Illinois children population (Fuller et al., 2021). In 2005, 52% of foster youth over the age of eleven committed one delinquent act in a six-month period (Cross et al., 2020). A national study of out-of-home placement youth found that 34% of eleven to seventeen-year-olds committed status offenses within six-month period (Children's Defense Fund, 2020). In 2018, an estimated 678,000 youthful victims of child abuse and neglect in the United States (Children's Bureau, 2020). Maltreatment

experienced by children was a worldwide concern with 87% of American children, 38.7% U.K. children, and 71% of adolescent in China experienced at least one form of child abuse and neglect in their lifetime (Yu & Chan, 2019).

Although research studies have provided statistical support for the increasing correlation between child maltreatment and delinquency, there was limited literature once a youth crossed over from dependency to delinquency (Huang et al., 2012 Ryan et al., 2007). One third of youth involved with the juvenile justice system experienced abuse and neglect (Goodkind et al., 2013). The Family First Prevention Service Act 2018 and the Federal Funds Prevention Service and Strengthen Family reflected the Federal government's increased interest and awareness of the overlap between child abuse & neglect and juvenile delinquency and supported a coordinated response to dually involved youth (Children's Defense Fund, 2020; Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2021).

This literature review explored how adverse life experiences, the traumatic nature of abuse and neglect, combined with delinquency and removal from the home and community affected the developmental process of racial minority girls. Racial minority youth were funneled through the juvenile justice system toward the cradle-to-the-prison pathway (Martin & Esenstad, 2015; Yamat, 2020). Racial minority juvenile offenders were incarcerated at a higher rate than non-minority youth and were two times more likely to be arrested than White youth (Durbin, 2021). In 2017, 43,580 youth were in juvenile placements with 67% being African American or Hispanic minorities (Children's Defense Fund, 2020).

Although youth arrest and detention decreased in recent years, the extreme racial disparities were still demonstrated across the juvenile justice system and adult criminal justice system (The Children's Fund, 2020). Racial minority youth were disproportionately represented from arrest to post-adjudicated placement (The Children's Fund 2020). The link between child abuse and delinquency was well-established (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2019; Goodkind et al., 2020; Yoon et al., 2018). Many studies discussed the disproportionate ethnic minority contact within the juvenile justice system and the disproportionate ethnic minority youth in out-of-home placement (Britner & Mossler, 2002; Cutuli et al., 2016; Richardson et al., 2018; Summersett-Ringgold et al., 2018). There was limited research noting the adverse effects of fragmentation of services under dual jurisdictions for Black girls (Fromknecht, 2014).

Black girls' pathways to delinquency were influenced by the responses from the juvenile justice system that affects girls differently (Javadani & Allen, 2014). Girls that experienced trauma, child abuse and neglect demonstrated and engaged in maladaptive and risky behaviors, often responded to stress and life changes with adversity, aggressive behaviors and violent outbursts (Goodkind et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2012; Killeen, 2019). The overrepresentation of Black girls that crossover to the juvenile justice system highlighted their unique needs and vulnerability (Ehrmann et al., 2019). The following sections further explored and discussed child abuse, neglect and juvenile delinquency, dually involved or cross over youth, delinquency and child abuse, foster care, and Black girls in foster care.

Child Abuse, Neglect, and Juvenile Delinquency

Across the nation, child abuse and neglect continues to persist as social and racial problems with Black families being disproportionately policed by child welfare system (Cenat et al., 2021; Durbin, 2021). Black families were two times more likely to be investigated by child welfare professionals and Black children were more than two times more likely to be taken into protective services and three times as likely to remain in-care for more than three years (Durbin, 2021). Victimized youth were more likely than the general population to engage in risky behaviors which resulted in juvenile delinquency and detention (Herz et al., 2010). Data revealed a strong correlation between maltreatment history and deep involvement with the juvenile justice system (Cross et al., 2020). Girls involved in the juvenile justice system experienced trauma, victims of physical abuse, emotional and sexual abuse, and family-related challenges more than their male peers. In addition, girls' experienced violence, trauma, poverty, racial, ethnic, and gender bias that led to juvenile justice involvement (Cenat et al., 2021; Fuller et al., 2021; Goodkind et al., 2020).

Victimization was linked to adverse and risky behaviors, negative emotions, violence, and delinquency (Yu & Chan, 2019). One study indicated youthful victimization was a global social problem with 87% of American youth, 38.7% of U.K. youth and 71% of Chinese youth experienced some form of child abuse, neglect, and victimization (Yu & Chan, 2019). During fiscal year 2018, in the United States there were 678,000 victims of maltreatment (Children's Defense Fund, 2020); girls were victimized at a higher rate than boys (Children's Defense Fund, 2020; Child Welfare

Information Gateway, 2021c). The negative consequences of maltreatment and trauma affected the development and life functioning, resulting in child welfare involvement, out-of-home placement, mental health issues, special education, and juvenile justice involvement. Ninety-two percent of youth involved with both public systems first experience foster care and then become involved with the juvenile justice system (Asscher et al., 2015). Vidal et al. (2017) study found .03% of maltreated youth had their first juvenile justice adjudication within six years of their initial child protection investigation.

Crossover and Dually Involved Youth

The disproportionality of minority youth in the juvenile justice system has been linked to the overrepresentation of minority youth in the child welfare system for some the child welfare system leads to involvement with the juvenile justice system (McCoy & Pearson, 2019; Ryan et al., 2011). Crossover youth and dually involved youth were broad terms that identified youth who were involved with both the child welfare system and juvenile justice system simultaneously (Herz et al., 2012; Nash & Bilchik, 2009; Ryan & Testa, 2005). Both systems were responsible for providing services and resources to provide placement stabilization, and minimize risky behaviors (Britner & Mossler, 2002; Nanda, 2012). Because of agency policies dually involved are less likely to receive comprehensive collaborative care (Herz et al., 2010).

Although, there was not a nationwide measure of crossover youth as each state differed in reporting youth who come into care, delinquency rates are 47% greater in combination of child abuse and neglect; 50% of youth in out-of-home placement report at

least one juvenile arrest and one-fifth were convicted of at least one offense (Huang et al., 2012). Most states lacked a centralized database for child welfare and juvenile justice records (Herz et al., 2012; Herz & Dierkhising, 2019; Tatem Kelley & Haskins, 2021). This lack of integrated databases made it difficult to identify dually involved youth and coordinate case management and services once a dually involved youth was identified (Herz et al., 2012). The lack of integration and system process between the individual state child welfare services and juvenile justice system hindered the estimating the number of youths involved in both systems. In recent years, the state of Illinois moved to data sharing between child welfare and juvenile justice system, granting access to staff (Fromknecht, 2014; Gjertson & Gultinan, 2018).

Previous research suggested child abuse was a causal contributor to juvenile delinquency. Youth involved in foster care or out-of-home placement had an increased risk of delinquency (Ryan & Testa, 2005; Watts, 2017). Huang et al. (2012) study found 8% of dually involved girls had at least one arrest before entering the child welfare system; 32% had additional reports of maltreatment referrals after arrest and 56% were charged with a second offense (Huang et al., 2012). Herz & Dierkhising (2019) summary of incidences of arrest of youth with and without child welfare in Chicago, Illinois found females represented a higher rate in the dual system (35%) than arrest of youth without child welfare involvement (28%). African American youth represented the majority of all cohorts with a greater majority among child welfare youth arrest. African American youth represented 60% of the arrest of child welfare youth compared to the 81% of African American child welfare arrest (Herz & Dierkhising, 2019). Dually involved

youth remained in foster care longer than youth only involved with child welfare services (Huang et al., 2012).

Many factors remained understudied in the research into the causal link between child abuse, neglect, and the development of juvenile delinquency (Ryan & Testa, 2005). Involvement with child welfare more than doubled the risk of a formal juvenile delinquent petition (Ryan et al., 2011). Ryan et al. (2011) research looked at a decade of data from Peoria County, Illinois juvenile arrests between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2009. That study showed for racial minority youth involvement in the child welfare services was a pathway to the juvenile justice system. African American youth in Peoria County comprised 25% of the general population but comprised 66% of youth in juvenile detention, 61% of youth on probation and 72% of the child welfare population. These findings showed African American youth represented three times their representation in the general population (Ryan et al., 2011). African American youth were at a higher risk of involvement with child welfare than the juvenile justice system. Any additional risks for delinquency associated with the child welfare system contributed to the overrepresentation of African American youths in the juvenile justice system. The analysis of the decade of Illinois data findings indicated child welfare status more than doubled the risk for formal delinquent petition. Youth who crossed over into the juvenile justice system from child welfare were disproportionately to be Black, this bias in decision making contributed to disproportionate minority contact (Ryan et al., 2011). Ryan et al. (2011) also noted judicial dispositions appeared influenced by out-of-home placement which increased the overrepresentation of ethnic minority youth in the juvenile

justice system. African American youth account for 15% of the U.S. population, yet account for 25% of child abuse investigations, 30% of substantiated investigations and 36% of out-of-home placements. Research indicated one third of juvenile delinquent youth experienced child abuse and neglect (Ryan et al., 2011).

Youth in substitute care are more likely to engage in delinquency. A study of Illinois foster-care youth found a large majority had a history of juvenile arrest, conviction and incarceration. Recent research suggested 10,850 youth transitioned from child welfare to juvenile justice system (Vidal et al., 2017). Watts (2017) findings connected child abuse to adult criminality among racial minority crossover girls.

Black Girls in Foster Care

Scholars and researchers are increasingly interested in the link between delinquent behaviors and youth receiving child welfare services (Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2008). There was a noticeable difference between girls and boys offending behaviors, delinquency, and out-of-home placement rates (Zahn et al., 2008a; Zahn et al., 2008b). In 2017, boys out-of-home placement was five times higher than girls; 85% of out-of-home placement was male (Hockenberry, 2020b). Girls represented a vulnerable population within the child welfare services and juvenile justice system. Girls represented an increasing number of youths involved in the child welfare services (Anspach, 2018).

Studies indicated over the past 40 years Black youth were overrepresented child welfare services (Jewel et al., 2009). Prior to the 1960's African American families were historically denied services and excluded from the child welfare services. Currently African America children are overrepresented in the child welfare services (Jewel et al.,

2009). African American youth are more likely than White children to be involved with the child welfare services. The disparities occur during the numerous decision-making points throughout the child welfare process which affects the possibility of their child welfare future and exit from out-of-home placement (Dettlaff et al., 2011).

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) established the national goals for safety, permanency and well-being for children in foster care with reunification as one of the guiding principles; foster care is a temporary placement and not their forever home (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 established the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect which sought to improve the monitoring and response to maltreatment. The legal changes focused on family preservation and child safety and quicker placement with different-race families and slower placement with same-race families (Wildeman & Waldfogel, 2014). Children entered the child welfare system through Child Protective Services which investigated maltreatment allegations and referrals and confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect. Based upon the findings the child welfare system's decisions often separated children from their families' following allegations of abuse or neglect. The children were considered at-risk of harm or the decision was made that services were better provided in a foster care home (Wildeman & Waldfogel, 2014).

According to Durbin (2021), Black families were twice as likely to be investigated for child abuse and neglect; Black children were more than twice as likely to be placed in protective custody than non-minority or Hispanic children (Durbin, 2021). Sixty-two percent of children in the Illinois foster care system were in substitute care

because of neglect or families having difficulties taking care of their children (Durbin, 2021). Black children experienced certain types of socioeconomic barriers and family situations, such as parental incarcerations, domestic violence, community violence, unemployment or underemployment and limited access to community resources and services that place them at higher risk for child abuse or maltreatment (Pryce et al., 2019).

Racial disparities continued throughout children's experiences in the foster care system where Black children are more likely to be placed in foster care, experience a longer stay in foster care and waited longer periods of time to reunify with their natural families and endured slower discharge rates than non-minority youth (Pryce et al., 2019). In addition, Black children were more than three times as likely to remain in care for more than 36 months (Fuller et al., 2021). In 2018, an estimated 437,283 children were in foster care; 30% were in care for more than a year, 15% were in care for two to three years, 10% were in care for three to four years and 3% were in care for more than five years; 44% of children in foster care were White; 23% were Black, 21% were Hispanic and 10% were Multiracial and one percent unknown; females represented 48% of youth in foster care and 52% were males (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018).

From 2008 to 2018, the percentage of Black children leaving foster care decreased while other races exiting foster care increased (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). The foster care system became a pathway to juvenile justice. Youth placed in foster care were at a higher risk of juvenile justice involvement described as foster-care-to-prison pipeline (Yamat, 2020). Girls placed in foster care and out-of-home

placement and crossover to the juvenile justice system at a higher rate than boys (Herz & Ryan, 2008; Flores et al., 2018). In 2018, 435,052 children were in substitute care. Black children accounted for 41% of all children in substitute care; Black children in foster care was twice that of White children (The Children's Fund, 2020). According to Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and National Women's Law Center determined 189,113 girls were in foster care, of that 57% were of color and 23% were Black (Miller & Stewart, 2020; Patrick & Chaudhry, 2017).

Child Abuse and Delinquency

The link between child abuse, neglect, and delinquency was different for boys and girls (Asscher et al., 2015). Different types of maltreatment, such as abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and violent offending may be gender specific, resulting in gender differences in offending. Child sexual abuse among girls was a strong predictor of adult criminal behaviors (Watts, 2017). The connection between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency are different between girls and boys, delaying the delinquent behaviors in girls than boys (Asscher et al., 2015). Gender influenced the link between maltreatment and maladaptive behaviors, coping skills and responses. Girls and boys reacted differently to stressful situations, whereas girls internalized and engage in emotional behaviors, boys externalized and reacted with anger and aggression. Boys were more likely than girls to engage in delinquency to adult criminality (Maschi et al., 2008). Research studies found the number of youth that crossover to the juvenile justice from the child welfare system increased as the youth's involvement in the child welfare systems increased. Scholars noted the change in juvenile justice system response to girl's

behavior equaled the increase in girls entering the system (Zahn et al., 2008b). Advocates for Black girls reported Black girls' misbehavior had not increased more than White girls', but they often received more severe punishments for the same behaviors as White girls (Epstein et al., 2017; Killeen, 2019).

Trends over the past forty years showed decreases in juvenile arrest and offenses. In 2006, boys accounted for 88% of violent crimes; 68% of property crimes and 84% of all drug offenses; girls represented less serious offenses and accounted for 54% of run away and 69% of prostitution (Puzzanchera, 2019). For the years 1985 and 2015, while juvenile arrests for boys declined, juvenile arrests for girls increased. Although juvenile arrests increased during this period most delinquency case for juvenile girls were diverted or received probation (Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2019). For youth in placement technical violations and status offenses were more common for girls than boys. In 2014, juvenile females comprised over half of petitioned runaway cases and one third of curfew cases (Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2019). Police arrested runaway girls at any time; girls were punished for runaway offenses at a higher rate than boys (Killeen, 2019). In 2015, girls accounted for 58.0% all petitioned truancy status offense (Ehrmann et al., 2019).

Racial minority girls were criminalized for trauma-related behaviors due to school policies that pushed racial minority girls to the juvenile justice system which was often described as the school-to-prison pipeline (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Martin & Esenstad, 2015). Black girls' failure to achieve a high school diploma placed them at risk for juvenile and criminal justice involvement, lower wage jobs, and unemployment (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Youth in out-of-home placement experienced multiple

placements moves which would not keep them in the same school district. Black youth in foster care were frequently labeled as emotionally and behaviorally unfit for traditional education settings for minor disciplinary infractions at school were criminalized (Johnson, 2021).

Rarely were there similarities in the social and environmental factors that contributed to delinquent behavior and criminal activity in Black girls' physiological or psychological development (Maschi et al., 2008). Much of the literature of female juvenile offenders focused on the risk factors correlated with delinquency and criminal activities adolescent female juvenile delinquency these risk factors stemmed from a multiple of factors within the girl's family, environment, school, peer relationships and neighborhood (Maschi et al., 2008). Some researchers noted a gender bias, racial bias and foster care bias while other explanations suggested discrimination by the people tasked with placement decisions for placement, or agency level infrastructure, institutional racism, organizational culture, disconnection from the community and quality of services, all were factors that explained the overrepresentation of Black children in the child welfare system (Pryce et al., 2019). African American female youth experienced a unique set of social inequities of racism and sexism (Killeen, 2019). Black female youth were not viewed as victims. They were viewed as less innocent and more adultlike than their White counterparts (Epstein et al., 2017; Killeen, 2019). Additionally, it was suggested that the child welfare system acted as a way to monitor, police and surveil Black families.

Out-of-Home Care

The importance of placement decision making after a youth entered the child welfare system is complex and important to the youth's well-being, service delivery policy and restrictiveness to placement. According to the 2017 Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement between 1997 and 2017, youth placement declined from 59% to 43,580 (Hockenberry, 2020b). During this same period 105,055 youth were in out-of-home placement. The number of public facilities decreased by 12% between 1997 and 2017 compared to the 58% decrease in private facilities (Hockenberry, 2020b). In addition, during this time period juvenile offenders detained in public facilities decreased by 59% (Hockenberry, 2020b). Between 2005 and 2011, the average length of stay in child welfare in the United States decreased from 28.6 to 23.9 months; youth in out-of-home placement decreased from 8.5% to 5.9% in group homes and decreased from 10.0% to 8.7% in residential treatment facilities. For FY 2019, there were 423,997 children in foster care. Foster care trends for September 30, 2009, and September 30, 2019, were almost equal; in 2009 there were 423,773 children in foster care. In 2019, 44.0% of foster care children were White; African American accounted for 23.0% of foster care children; Hispanic foster care children accounted for 21.0%; Multiracial and American Indian foster care children accounted for 8% and 2% respectfully (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021; Chor et al., 2015). Research contributed this reduction to changes in placement decision making in the child welfare system. Chor et al. (2015) noted the growing interest in placement decision making was to improve children's experiences in out-of-home placement.

Two decision making models in the Illinois child welfare system implemented between 2005-2013 were compared: the multidisciplinary Child and Youth Investment Teams (CAYIT) and the Child Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Algorithm, that recommended the best placement based on a need-based support and clinical assessment of the child for out-of-home placement from least to most restrictive placement settings for youth in the state's custody (Chor, 2013; Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2010). Both CAYIT and the CANS Algorithm considered the child's placement history, placement availability, geographic limitations, matching out-of-home placement with clinical needs, policy demands and best placement of a child (Chor, 2013; Chor et al., 2013). This study compared placement decisions between CAYIT and CANS Algorithm to predict child well-being in out-of-home placement over time. Based on 7,816 placement records for 6,096 children in 2005-2010, the CAYIT and CANS Algorithm worked to identify and place children in least and most restrictive settings (Chor et al., 2015). Even though advancements were made in decision making models, there was limited current empirical literature on decision-making in child welfare systems. Chor et al. (2015) noted significant challenges to the decision-making process, such as inconsistent placement criteria and a greater importance on safe removal of children from homes than on stability in out-of-home placements.

Girls in substitute care represent at a higher number than boys; girls were at a greater risk of juvenile justice involvement than boys (Flores et al., 2018). Out-of-home placement occurred for a portion of children involved with the child welfare system (Chor, 2013).

The removal from the natural parents or primary caregiver had negative influence on the child's ability to form attachments, sense of self, safety, and security (Daughtery, 2011; Dettlaff et al., 2020). The removal from the home had a negative influence on the developmental processes which led to more instability, more emotional and behavioral issues, and increased sense of disconnection from family, friends and community; older youth had difficulty forming positive relationships with caregivers (Leathers et al., 2021; Roberts, 2008). A study conducted by Annie E. Casey Foundation found the majority of children and youth placed in foster care had stable placements while in care, however, more than one third experienced more than three placements (Casey Family Programs, 2018). Another study by Hawk et al. (2020) demonstrated externalizing behaviors, such as aggression, increased the risk for placement disruption. Subsequently, placement disruption increased the likelihood of future placement instability. Placement disruption and multiple placements were related to mental health disorders and externalizing problematic behaviors in children and in need of complex services to address the disruptive behaviors (Leathers et al., 2021). Ryan and Testa (2005) reported foster children that had at least two placement disruptions were four to five time more likely to be involved with the juvenile justice system.

When a child entered the foster care system, the child welfare agency determined the type of placement for the child which included the home of a relative, home of a parent, home of a non-relative, fictive kin/kinship placement, therapeutic foster home, residential treatment placement or congregate care setting (Chor, 2013; Chor et al., 2013). Federal law and best practices determined children be placed in least restrictive

placement and developmentally appropriate family-like environments. According to a study conducted by Chiu et al. (2011) the type of placement and placement instability were significant predictors of juvenile justice involvement. Wildeman and Waldfogel (2014) wrote children in the foster care system struggled with numerous problems and struggled throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Patrick and Chaudhry (2017) noted girls in foster care had a higher risk of teen pregnancy which created additional barriers to education and career opportunities. Other studies indicated children placed in kinship placements engaged in fewer externalizing behaviors and were stable in their placement while youth in group home placements experienced higher rates of delinquency and arrests (Koh & Testa, 2011; Ryan et al., 2008). Goodkind et al. (2013) reported placement instability increased the likelihood for juvenile justice involvement. Crossover youth had multiple placement disruptions and spent longer time in out-of-home placement (Young et al., 2015).

Decision Making

Decades of child welfare and juvenile justice studies demonstrated the racial disparities among African American youth. In the child welfare and juvenile justice system, racial disproportionality, overrepresentation, disproportionate minority contact and disparity for Black youth are a long-standing issue and a well-documented issue (National Juvenile Justice Network, 2013; Ryan et al., 2014). There was increased concern and acknowledgment about the child's race and characteristics that affected the child welfare decision making and about the practitioners decision making abilities emerged as themes in child welfare (Miller et al., 2013). Although the link between

mental health services and child welfare characteristics (type of placement and length of substitute care) was well documented, the disparity in services continued to be unexplained (DeNard et al., 2017). Within the child welfare system implicit and explicit individual bias were conceptualized factors of racial disparities but more recently research looked at biases and racial biases of child welfare practitioners (DeNard et al., 2017; Gillingham & Humphreys, 2010). Few studies explored the link of provider implicit and explicit bias to disparities in mental health services and minority children. For instance, DeNard et al. (2017) found most people provided non-prejudicial responses when asked direct questions about implicit and explicit bias. While caseworkers' language illuminated their biases and reflected negative perceptions and biases.

A growing body of research sought to understand the characteristics of child welfare professionals, their views of the child welfare system, their youths, their agency and child welfare policies and whether these views varied according to the child welfare professions' characteristics e.g., education, background, personal experiences and attitudes (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2015). Miller et al. (2013) found that individual bias and systemic and structural bias existed and contributed to disparity and disproportionality, which added to the negative perceptions at multiple points in the child welfare continuum whether intentional or not. Systemic and structural bias influenced the organizational routine that unintentionally negatively affected ethnic minority youth. Individual bias affected the system level practices and policies which influenced the individual level decision-making process. In addition, research literature indicated bias embedded in foster care placement standards differentially affected racial minority children. In

response to research which documented these biases, Miller et al. (2013) found when family income and case workers' perception of risk for maltreatment was controlled, race emerged as a significant predictor in decisions.

While there was research on decision making associated with removing youth from their home because of child abuse, trauma or unsafe home environments, little was known about the placement decision making when children came into care, entered out-of-home placements or ended up in one type of placement versus another, or what decisions guided the placement decision-making process (Chor et al., 2013). Decision making in the child welfare system is complex and challenging process. Child welfare systems had the responsibility of ensuring the safety of all children that came to their attention (Damman et al., 2020). In a brief by Capacity Building Center for States (2017) the child welfare decision making practices directly affected the ability of child welfare agencies to achieve safety outcomes. Evidence suggested that safety decisions were not always consistent among workers in the same jurisdiction. Caseworkers made decisions and completed assessments during times of strong family emotions with high expectations for accountability. Child welfare professionals made decisions that affected outcomes for children and families during times of strong family emotions and worker duress. Furthermore, child welfare professionals worked within a limited time frame, limited information, and limited available resources and services for families. The brief further indicated that evidence suggested safety decisions were not always consistent amongst child welfare professionals (Capacity Building Center for States, 2017).

Research has shown that the decision-making process was influenced by multiple factors, which included organizational factors, caseworker attributes and characteristics, community, and case factors (Maguire-Jack et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2013). Gillingham and Humphreys (2010) noted decision making highlighted the fallibility and limitations of the decision makers. Miller et al. (2013) noted the introduction of risk assessment tools into child welfare practices represented was an attempt to implement a more objective process for decision making and reduce implicit and explicit bias from subjective assessments made quickly or under duress by child welfare professionals. In addition, increased consistency of case management and decision making across the child welfare service continuum (DeNard et al., 2017).

While there was some indication that child welfare professionals deliberately inflated the scores of cases to increase eligibility of families for services or child welfare, professionals only used the tools after they had reached a decision about a case (Broadhurst et al., 2009). Limited research in risk assessment tools at the field level suggested that using risk assessment tools did not necessarily improve practice and had unintended consequences which restricted their value (Broadhurst et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2013).

In response to findings like those described above, racial disparities in the child welfare system were at all levels along the child welfare continuum. Which contributed to the larger discussion about disproportionality and disparity for reduction of bias in the decision-making process. Differences in the decision making were not confined to the individual caseworker but also occurred at the organization level. Woodmass et al. (2017)

explored the influence of race and the disproportionality at various decision points, also included placement and geographic locations. This challenged the idea that standardized risk assessment tools eliminated the subjective process in decision making; risk assessment tools could not solely correct the differences in social standing, social power and historical systematic biases in the child welfare system (Woodmass et al., 2017).

Font and Maguire-Jack (2015) research demonstrated specific factors, such as community, organizational, caseworker case and policy influenced child welfare decisions, but did not consider whether these factors had the same association across racial and ethnic groups. According to Woodmass et al., (2017) the role of race in decision making required the understanding of risk and factors known to influence the decision-making process throughout the child protections case process. Maguire-Jack et al. (2020) explored factors that influenced out-of-home placement and found that a youth's race and ethnicity were associated with removal from the home, case, and community characteristics. The results noted that stereotypes linked Black families with perceived character deficits that affected how child welfare professionals perceived child risk factors (Maguire-Jack et al., 2020). The study also identified one of the factors that influenced the out-of-home placement decisions was the cooperation of the family.

According to Font and Maguire-Jack (2015), child welfare decisions followed the decision-making continuum from case opening intake to case closure and throughout the case. Child welfare professionals have their own personal threshold to make decisions and judgments. Furthermore, this threshold changed with policies, procedures, organizational factors, and the child welfare professional's experience level. Although,

research studies indicated decision-making tools, such as assessments for the child welfare system, decision-making continued to be subjective (Capacity Building Center for States, 2017; Damman et al., 2020). Researchers also found that new child welfare professionals were more likely to err on the side of caution and make decisions for out-of-home placement whereas child welfare professionals with formal social work education and/or high caseload were less likely to place a youth in out-of-home placement (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2015). More importantly, their research also found that the child welfare professional's attitude influenced and drove the out-of-home placement decision.

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 2 presented the disparity, overrepresentation, and disproportionality within the child welfare system and juvenile justice that impacted dually involved Black girls as depicted in the literature. Current literature and recent studies highlighted the systematic issues within the child welfare system that influenced and affected Black girls that became involved with both systems (Leathers, et al., 2021; Marshall & Haight, 2014; Pryce et al., 2019; Wildeman & Waldfogel, 2014). Placement dynamics impacted and influenced the youth's stability, length of placement and location of placement and child welfare outcomes. Many of these dynamics negatively impacted Black girls who crossover to the juvenile justice system (Huang et al., 2012). Understanding the differences between girls and boy's criminal behavior was essential for the development of intervention and prevention programs and future policies for dually involved youth in

the child welfare services. Few studies noted the involvement of the youth in the decision-making process that affected their lives.

Chapter 3 focused on the research design, rationale and methodology, data collection, and trustworthiness of this research study. See Appendix A for the data collection instrument used with research interview protocol. Chapter 2 provided information about the study and how the study was conducted and completed which included design, research and interview questions, the setting and sample population, instrumentation, data collection and procedures, data analysis, validity, limitations, expected findings and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore and understand how placement decision influenced and impacted the development process of dually involved African American girls. Previous Illinois DCFS policy and programs over the last two decades created a team decision making process for youth in care. Given the implementation of a team decision making process and the systemic disparity of African American youth, a gap was created in the placement decisions of African American dually involved girls regarding out-of-home placement and their ability to achieve stability in out-of-home placements. Current research supported a connection between decision making and out-of-home placement, stability, placement disruption, length of stay, school success, and development. The findings from this research study could lead to improved out-of-home placement decisions for African American dually involved girls.

In addition, this research study contributed to discussions about services and resources for out-of-home placement decisions associated with development processes of African American dually involved girls. Effective services and resources were important for placement stability and to address complex trauma and mental health concerns. With consistent services and resources, foster parents and dually involved youth-in care learned the needed skills for positive development and relationships directly related to placement stability and improved behaviors.

While numerous studies existed on disparity and disproportionality of African American youth in the child welfare system, little research has been conducted to explore child welfare professionals' perspectives about placement decisions for African American dually involved girls. In addition, few studies explored child welfare professionals' perspectives of the decision-making process for out-of-home placement. Little is known about this phenomenon, but a considerable amount of research was completed on the overrepresentation of Black youth in the child welfare system—thus, a qualitative inquiry was the appropriate starting point for this research. The qualitative goal was to determine the meaning a group attributed to a certain problem (Creswell 2009; Patton, 2002).

Qualitative exploration was the process of identifying and understanding the human experience. Qualitative research involved an interactive and interpretive process approach between a researcher and study participants that allowed for identification of emerging findings and themes (Creswell, 2007). Current research on systemic disparity and disproportionality of African American youth in the social service and justice system was the foundation that supported this study. Relevant to the relationship between placement decision-making process and child welfare professionals' perspectives of how out-of-home placement decisions impacted the youth's development process. This study provided insight into how systemic barriers of out-of-home placement decision-making processes for dually involved African American girls were addressed to support and influence policy and social change in the state's child welfare and juvenile justice system.

Research inquiry for this study was: What are the perspectives of child welfare professionals of the out-of-home placement decision-making process, and what challenges, strategies, and changes do child welfare professionals use to reduce and overcome possible racial and gender bias to ensure effective placement decision making for African American girls involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice system who experienced racial and gender disparities? The chapter included a discussion about the research design and rationale, research questions, the role of the researcher, settings, population and selection, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, internal and external validity, limitations, ethical procedures, and issues of trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

This study was a qualitative approach to understand the perspectives of child welfare professionals' out-of-home placement decisions and how those decisions impacted the development process of dually involved African American girls. During in-depth interviews with child welfare professionals who shared their experiences, I gained important insight into their perspectives, perceptions, and feelings on their out-of-home placement decisions for dually involved African American girls. In addition, I explored how participants' experiences contributed to their ability to make placement decisions. In the phenomenological approach to qualitative research, individual perspectives and individual stories were the central points of understanding how these perspectives influenced life (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Upon receipt of participants' informed consent form, I conducted interviews by telephone. Research study participants were

current child welfare professionals who make out-of-home placement decisions for dually involved African American female youth.

Snowball sampling was the recruitment process used. I identified and recruited 3 pilot participants participated in the interview process and shared the research invitation with other child welfare professionals. I identified a group of 11 child welfare professionals who participated in the interview process. Snowball sampling was appropriate for this study and provided an opportunity to collect comprehensive and thorough information for my study. The snowball sampling strategy depended on existing research participants who helped identify other potential participants. Patton (2002) noted that qualitative inquiry focused in-depth on small samples.

Sample size depended on what a researcher wanted to know and the purpose of the inquiry and what was useful (Patton, 2002). For this study, 11 child welfare professionals were invited to participate in this study, and the selected participants possessed criteria that aligned with the focus and objective of this study. Smaller sample sizes were valuable for gathering rich, in-depth information. The sample size was large enough to gain rich cultural descriptions to describe patterns and themes associated with the group until saturation was achieved to understand the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2009; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). I recruited a sample of 11 child welfare professionals who worked in the child welfare system and who made out-of-home placement decisions for dually involved African American female youth.

Prior to the interviews, participants identified their names, and their first and last initials were used only for my reference and field notes. I assigned each participant a

numeric code identifying which participant they were so their name was not part of the study. The interview questions allowed me to hear the perspective, experiences, and stories of child welfare professionals. Through their shared information, I identified how they achieved placement stability and addressed needs, concerns, and challenges of race and gender, social connections, and developmental processes that dually involved African American girls encountered in the child welfare system. I determined child welfare professionals' perspectives on policy and systemic barriers that impacted the placement decisions for youth in care.

From the conducted interviews, I identified common themes for initial thematic analysis relevant to the relationship between placement decisions and addressed stability and developmental process. Harris and Hackett (2007) noted at various key decision points of the child welfare system that racial disproportionality increased, notably referral bias and lack of professional awareness influenced bias. Each of my interviews with participants was scheduled for 1–2 hours. I encouraged meaningful discussion relevant to placement decisions and systemic barriers; some interviews were less than 60 minutes, and others were longer than 60 minutes. Interview responses were audio recorded to document the discussion for transcription, reference, and verification.

Through snowball sampling, I identified several participants. However, the research interview process took longer than expected. After the informed consent agreement was sent out, the vast majority of the initially identified participants chose not to participate in the interview process and did not respond to follow-up emails.

Role of the Researcher

I participated in my qualitative research through an in-depth interviewing process. Through this interaction, I listened and explored each study participant's lived experiences to understand their perspectives of the social service field and the youth they served. I expected participants to share important and honest details about their experiences in a transparent and genuine way. As the researcher, it was my obligation and responsibility to ensure participants felt safe and confident that their experiences were protected and respected.

These in-depth qualitative interviews went beyond ordinary conversations and were an exploration of meanings, individual experiences and interpretations, thoughts, and feelings of each study participant (Creswell, 2007, Sutton & Austin, 2015; Ward et al., 2018). Discussions with participants were used to explore and determine the meaning a group attributed to a certain problem (Creswell 2009; Patton, 2002). Throughout the research study, I remained aware of any bias from my formal and informal experiences or any bias that could impact the research results.

Methodology

Procedures for Recruitment Participation and Data Collection

Participants were child welfare professionals who had the professional ability to make out-of-home placement decisions for dually involved Black girls. Participants had direct and indirect involvement with placement decisions that resulted in out-of-home placement, length of time in place, location of placement, and placement disruption. The geographic area was the central and southern regions of the state of Illinois, which had

numerous DCFS regional office sites, numerous private agency locations, three juvenile detention centers, and five qualified residential treatment program facilities. Thus, the recording of their experiences and perspectives of placement decisions was important to this study.

The participant selection technique was snowball sampling that hinged on participants' to reach out and identified other potential participants. The plan for recruitment was to identify and use pilot participants who interacted with the population being studied. Participants were identified through word of mouth and professional connection and were trustworthy, diligent, knowledgeable, respectful, and interested in participating in the interview process. My pilot participants' involvement included participating in the interview process and supported the recruitment process and shared the research invite and facilitated contact between potential study participants and me.

After the pilot participant's contacted and shared of the research invite, and with permission from potential study participants, I made direct contact. I introduced myself and discussed the research. I advised their participation was based on the research criteria. The participants who met the criteria were sent an email which explained the research study, extended an invitation to participate in the study, and requested they shared with other like-minded professionals to participate in the study. An email invite was sent out explaining the research study, the purpose and steps to participate in the study, and the informed consent forms. Once confirmation was received noting interest and willingness to participate, an email was sent out scheduling an interview appointment. I found pilot participants were helpful in other ways.

I interviewed 11 participants who met the research criteria: child welfare professionals, employed by a child welfare system provider, provide social services and resources to youth in care, case managers or service workers, with 6 months or more with their organizations. All participants had a caseload that included dually involved girls. My data collection process was in-person interviews; however, because of the global pandemic and COVID-19 concerns, video conference was a secondary data collection plan. Phone calls replaced face-to-face contact and video conference and was the preferred method of data collection by the participants. During the interview, I audio recorded the discussion and maintained field notes. From the participants' experiences identification of emerging findings and themes were developed (Creswell, 2007). I interviewed 11 participants and data saturation was met. Saturation was a criterion when a researcher stopped gathering data because no additional data were found and similar instances were repeated (see Saunders et al., 2018).

Instrumentation

The interview protocol used for this study consisted of 11 semistructured open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The questions allowed the study participants to describe their experiences in the way they experienced it (Bevan, 2014). The semistructured interview questions built on and addressed specific topics related to placement decisions and out-of-home care (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). The semistructured interview questions allowed the participants to tell their stories and described their perspectives about placement decisions, the challenges of maintaining connections, the social concerns and barriers to school, peers, community, family that

impacted placement stability, challenges, and experiences they encountered working with dually involved girls. As the researcher, I composed questions that helped encourage the participants to share their perspective of the placement decisions. The interview questions reflected the current literature. The questions built on the level of disproportionality, scrutiny and disparity that dually involved Black girls encountered.

Follow-up questions occurred when clarification or more information was required. I encouraged the research study participants to feel comfortable with sharing what they felt was relevant and necessary to the discussion. To ensure all the shared information was collected for future analysis, I audio recorded each interview sessions. The participants were advised of the audio recording and gave their permission before the interview started. Upon completing the interview, I acknowledged and thanked each participant for their time and asked if had any additional information to add and offered to answer any questions they had regarding the current research study. I gained permission to follow up and contact the participants to clarify any information gathered during the interview and offered a copy of the completed transcripts and finished study.

Exploratory/Pilot Study

The pilot study for this study was conducted with practice interviews using the interview questions with a few child welfare professionals who did not meet the participant criteria. The practice interviews identified any negative reactions to the questions and assessment of the questions from the responses and flow of the questions. This practice session allowed for the testing of the equipment. The interview questions were adapted to ensure gathered information addressed the research questions (Frankfort-

Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Patton, 2002). Practice interviews helped adapt and modify the questions, the feedback confirmed the interview questions were appropriate.

Interview questions were adapted as necessary to ensure they worked, connected and fit the research. Validity and reliability were established during the pilot sessions to address and prevent bias, problems or negative reactions to the interview and questions. In addition, the pilot addressed participants' ability to tell their stories, described their experience as they responded and addressed the interview questions (Bevan, 2014; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Data Analysis Plan

Phenomenology is a method to study human societies, resembling the ordinary person's self-reflective, and systematic approach to learning about the world around them. Data analysis relied on rich and valid information. During the interview process, I used field notes which was an important method for gathering and supplementing the data collection with specific information and key details about the interview process (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). After each interview, I transcribed each audio recording. Both paper notes, electronic transcripts and audio recording were securely housed. As the researcher, it was my responsibility to ensure content validity and alignment. Quality data analysis was key to proving relevance and validity.

As the researcher, I audio-recorded each interview and transcribed the audio recording. Thematic analysis was accomplished by recognizing emerging themes. Given the small sample size hand coding was a viable option for this study, however I used the Data Analysis Software NVivo. A descriptive picture formed through the data analysis,

which highlighted the pathway for positive changes and better understanding of relationships in the child welfare and juvenile justice system.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The qualitative research strengths were validity and trustworthiness, which determined if the findings were accurate from the participant, researcher or reader's point of view (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Creswell (2009) noted 8 different strategies used to enhance credibility and trustworthiness for qualitative research. Creswell (2009) suggested identifying 1 or more strategies to check for accuracy of the findings and incorporate validity strategies. Patton (2002) encouraged similar methods to increased and established trustworthiness. I relied on member checking to gain understanding for perspective and determined the accuracy of the findings through the in-depth interview process and analysis. The interview questions were developed based on the current literature and allowed for flexibility for follow up to gain additional clarification. During the interview process, identified themes were revisited which ensured description consistency. Through these strategies, I ensured the trustworthiness of my research study and allowed the participants the opportunity to comment on the findings.

Credibility

As the researcher, I spent the vast majority of my professional career working in the best interest of youth in-care, striving to achieve permanency and safety in their lives. I also participated in permanency committees that reviewed the length of time a youth spent in substitute care placements instead of transitioning home to their natural families or placed with relatives or fictive kin in their own communities. Creswell (2009) noted

that the researcher should identify and clarify any bias that affected or were brought to the study and that self-reflective disclosure created honesty and transparency that readers appreciated.

Reflectivity was a core characteristic of qualitative research and contained comments by the researcher about how their findings and interpretation were shaped by their own background (Creswell, 2009). A thorough study depends on being an aware and responsible researcher (Whitting & Lee III, 2003). I lessened any bias through the in-depth semistructured interview questions and a topic guide avoided any closed-ended questions and any leading questions in my efforts to drill down on the systematic barriers that affected dually involved Black girls.

Ethical Procedures

Creswell (2009) wrote during the proposal writing process that researchers need to anticipate any ethical concerns that occurred during the study. It was recommended that researchers developed trust and protected their research participants; promoted the integrity of research; and guarded against misconduct that reflected on their organization (p. 87). Ethical practices protected individuals relevant to qualitative research. Creswell (2009) recommended that researchers' design a set of ethical guidelines and standards which included study invites, consent forms, and interview protocol. This helped to ensure the researcher respected the research participants and the research site. This required the researcher to consider the needs of the people and participants of the study and how the study would improve the human situation (p. 90).

The Walden University IRB policies and procedures provided ethical principles that I followed throughout my study. I received IRB approval (IRB Approval 07-28-22-0131702). Participants received the informed consent form and were required to send me an email of “I Consent” to participate in the study. The consent forms explained the study’s goal, the data collection and analysis process, and the risks and benefits. Participants were advised of the choice to withdraw the involvement of their participation at any time without conflict. Number codes are used to represent participants. Audio cassette recordings and transcripts containing interviews are stored in a locked container. Five years after completing the study, all data will be removed and the flash drive will be destroyed.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the child welfare professional’s perspective of the out-of-home placement decisions of African American dually involved females and contributed to how those placement decisions impacted dually involved females’ ability to achieve stability and positive development. Through this study of placement decisions, child welfare policy makers had a view of the relationship between placement decisions and stability which was key to development. The qualitative approach to this issue highlighted the child welfare professional’s perspective gained through the in-depth interview questions. The data analysis was applied to answer the central research question guiding this study.

This study addressed the gap in existing research literature by demonstrating how the out-of-home placement policy for African American dually involved females impact

their ability to achieve stability and positive development. In addition, findings in this research study supported thoughtful discussion by child welfare professionals on how social and policy changes in the out-of-home placement decision impacted systemic disparity, increased stability, positive development and decreased juvenile delinquency of dually involved girls. Chapter 3 discussed the research design, method, data collection, procedures on data analysis and issues of trustworthiness. The researcher's role was explained, included the protection of the participants rights, anonymity, participation, and confidential fundamentals. Chapter 4 the data analysis results of each interview were provided. Chapter 5, the research findings were summarized and implications for changed were discussed.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Through interaction and interviews with research study participants, I collected data for this qualitative research study. Data collection was an important aspect of a research study because it demonstrated diligence toward the study and validity of findings as they applied to the central research question which guided this study to highlight a gap in the existing literature. Research study participants were knowledgeable of the child welfare system and were experts of their lived experiences with the child welfare system. Study participants shared their experiences and they provided a better understanding of a larger phenomenon.

In this study, I explored the child welfare system out-of-home placement decision-making process for dually involved African American girls and impact on their developmental levels. Current research showed disparity in out-of-home placements with a disproportionate number of African American youth in out-of-home placement. Three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of child welfare professionals on the out-of-home placement decision-making process?

RQ2: What challenges, barriers, and strategies are faced by child welfare professionals in making out-of-home placement decisions?

RQ3: What strategies and changes do child welfare professionals engage to reduce and overcome possible racial and gender bias to ensure effective placement decision making?

In this chapter, I discussed the setting for the study, the participant demographics, characteristics relevant to the study population, the data collection process, data coding and analysis, trustworthiness, and the results of this study.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study using the semistructured interview questions with an administrator, a clinician, and a supervisor from 2 different agencies in the state of Illinois before I started data collection. In this pilot study, each of the pilot participants were interviewed individually using the drafted semistructured interview questions. When the pilot interviews were completed, I reviewed the audio tapes and my field notes to reflect on the interviewees' comments, shared experiences, examples of changes in policies and practices over the years and estimated the amount of time that each interview required.

Setting

Data collection for this research study was mainly conducted by telephone, except for 1 participant who emailed their responses to the interview questions. Because of the continuing global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the restrictions were still in place. Study participants also voiced time and travel constraints that prohibited in-person meetings. Therefore, study participants had the option to participated via Zoom (webinar conference) or telephone.

Demographics

This research study included telephone interviews with 3 pilot participants and 11 voluntary participants; the duration of each interview was 45–60 minutes. Each of the

participants worked for a private child welfare agency or for the state of Illinois child welfare system in the southern region of Illinois. Each of the participants were part of the out-of-home placement decision-making process.

The research study sample was comprised of 1 male participant and 10 female participants. Of those 11 participants, 7 were Black and 4 were White; 3 were supervisors and the other 8 were child service workers. Only 1 participant had 1 year of experience in the Illinois child welfare system; the rest of the participants had over 12 years of experience in the child welfare system. Each participant held a bachelor's degree or master's degree in social work.

Data Collection

This research study included 11 voluntary participants who were child welfare professionals actively working in the child welfare system and were responsible for out-of-home placement decisions. This sample was generated through snowball sampling. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the sample size was 11 child welfare professionals, and saturation was achieved.

Except for 1 interviewee who emailed their written responses to the interview questions, data were collected for this research study via telephone. Each participant received a phone call, followed up with an email containing the invitation to participate and a brief introduction of the study. In response to the email, the participant indicated their willingness to participate and scheduled the interview. Each participant received the informed consent form and the semistructured interview questions. The data were collected through a 45–60-minute telephone conversation between each participant and

me. The telephone conversation was guided by the 11 semistructured interview questions (see Appendix A).

My conversation with each participant was informally influenced by the natural flow developed through the interview. The participants voluntarily shared information, and I sought clarity and additional information as needed. Each participant was interviewed one time, and I provided reflection and summary frequently throughout the interview that ensured understanding and accuracy. The interviews were conducted during 2022 and scheduled at times convenient for each participant and for me.

Study participants were invited via email to participate in the research interview process. The email contained a brief introduction of my research study and the informed consent form. Each participant received the interview questions prior to the scheduled interview. In the invitation, I asked the participants to respond by email if they were willing to participate in the study. Of the 40 participants invited, 11 agreed to participate.

After I received their email indicating willingness to participate in the study, I immediately contacted them, confirmed their willingness, sent the informed consent form and interview questions, and scheduled the 45–60-minute interview. During our conversation, I briefly explained my research study; I also revisited the invitation information and reassured the participant I maintained their anonymity. I also advised the interview would be audio recorded. On the day of the scheduled interview, I contacted the research study participant at the telephone number provided when I confirmed the interview.

Except for 1 participant, each participant interview was conducted via telephone and recorded using an audio tape recorder. One participant emailed their typed responses to the interview questions. This was followed up with a phone call for clarity and additional information. I recorded participant interviews with an audio cassette tape recorder. I initially selected the audio tape recorder when I had planned to conduct the interviews in person. In addition to the audio recording, I maintained notes on a paper copy of the interviews, and a notebook for each participant's interview. The notes were used during the interview for follow-up questions, documented responses for accuracy, clarity of wording and acronyms used, and for summarization during the interview.

In Chapter 3 of this research study, I described the planned data collection methodology, neither variations nor unusual circumstances were experienced during the data collection process. The snowball sampling referenced in Chapter 3 supported the recruitment process through facilitated phone calls and emailed introductions between study participants and me. In addition, I received recruitment support from 4 of the study participants who provided additional contacts as potential study participants. The data collection procedure was the same for each participant and included a brief overview of the research study. The study participants emailed consent, and verbal consent was received at the time of the interview, and a final check ensured their voluntary participation. Each participant was reminded they could pass on question they had no knowledge of or did not want to answer. One participant emailed their responses to the questions. Two participants passed on 2 questions, noting they had not experienced what the questions asked.

Allowing the research participants to tell their perspectives and lived experiences was key to the data collection process. According to Creswell (2009), the process of gathering information involved in-depth interviews, and importance was given to describing the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of people who had experienced it. Through in-depth information, I developed an in-depth description of the given phenomenon or experience. Throughout the data collection process, I kept my preconceptions out of the interview process (Alase, 2017; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Data collection for this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study included the following: (a) conduct semistructured interviews, (b) interview duration 60 minutes, (c) individual interviews, (d) location was each participant's decision, (e) involved use of technological devices, and (f) adhered to IRB requirements.

Data Analysis

After each interview, the recording was transcribed into a digital format through Microsoft Office voice dictation. Depending on the interview length, transcription of the interview was completed in 6–8 hours. I transcribed each interview which was the most cost-effective and timely choice. I listened to small sections of the audio recording of the interviews which ensured accuracy of the transcription while I followed along to the printed transcript.

NVivo was the most cost-effective option for data analysis. The transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo which housed the data and supported data analysis through electronic coding. The NVivo software and tutorials were difficult to navigate, and I encountered some difficulties doing so. After numerous attempts at importing the data

and coding the data, I had a better understanding of the in-depth interviews, which allowed me a better grasp and understanding of the interviews. This helped with the coding and development of themes from the gathered data. Through the NVivo coding process, I developed an intentional academic connection with the participants through their perspectives and lived experiences; as a researcher, this understanding and bond supported my analytical ability.

NVivo software is a manual coding process that was effective in qualitative studies that focused on participants' voices (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). NVivo was the only method of data analysis used for this small-scale study. I assigned each participant a code: Participant 1 (Pt 1) through Participant 11 (Pt 11). While I read the interview transcripts, I was attentive to repetitive words and phrases which prompted me to highlight sentences from the interviews. I created a node to categorize the sentence. Through the NVivo coding process, I created nodes and codes from the developed themes from the collected data.

In this study, I used IPA and followed the hermeneutics principles for research data analysis, fundamentals, methodology, and data analysis method. The hermeneutics approach recommended that a researcher interpret the meaning found in the relation to the phenomena and focused on understanding the meaning of the experience, searched for themes and engaged with the data interpretively. This methodology amplified the lived experiences of the research participants so a researcher made sense interpretively of the lived experiences and achieved a true understanding of the participants. This approach allowed for a researcher to develop the best opportunity to understand the

innermost deliberation of the lived experiences of the research participants (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

IPA allowed for an understanding of perspectives. IPA offered direction on how to approach a phenomenon with a pathway and guidance for sampling, data collection, and analysis. IPA methods were used to find, explore, understand, and develop themes and categorized the responses of research participants with the intent to tell their lived experiences (Alase, 2017; Frechette et al., 2020). IPA projects involved collecting qualitative data from a reasonably homogenous sample pool of participants who shared a contextual perspective in a given phenomenon (Alase, 2017; Noon, 2018). According to Alase (2017), the IPA process of interpretations and data analysis started with identifying the process of analysis for a single interview case, followed by a thorough, detailed analysis before moving to the next interview case. A researcher implementing IPA used the following steps: (a) listened to the interviews at minimum three times; (b) became familiar and began noting phrases and sentences, developing themes; (c) looked for emergent themes and connections, groups themes; (d) began coding of patterns or nodes (words or phrases) that represented the data; and (e) focused on credibility of the data.

IPA data coding required the researcher to read and re-read through the interview transcripts, identified common themes, searched for words or phrases that were repeated in the participants' responses, clarity and categorized the pattern of responses by the participants. The next step included actions on condensing the identified sentences or phrases into fewer words, moving closer to the core of what the participant expressed. This step allowed the researcher to get to the gist of the participant's lived experience.

The third step allowed the research to narrow down the participants responses to a few words.

I imported the data and read each transcripts line-by-line. I highlighted phrases and sentences which created codes/nodes of common and reoccurring words, phrases, keywords, and additional details with an inductive approach to coding. Further, I engaged in a combination of having a rough idea of some of the themes, I expected to see from the pilot interviews to new themes that emerged as I read and reread through the interview transcripts. I added a description to each node and described them in more detail. The importing of data into coding with nodes represented the repeated themes, which allowed the categorizing of the highlighted words and phrases. Thus, a full description was narrowed down.

I identified 16 codes: (a) barriers and social concerns, (b) lack of resources, (c) scrutiny, (d) culture identity, (e) gender and race, (f) self-care, (g) caring adult, (h) geographic, (i) loss, (j) placement, (k) collaboration, (l) teamwork, (m) school, (n) technology, (o) policy and practice, and (p) system. These codes were then aggregated into seven code sets: (a) challenges, (b) barriers, (c) strategies, (d) cultural identity and bias, (e) placement stability and decisions, (f) professional relationships and community, and (g) system and policy. From these codes, 3 themes emerged: (a) barriers to placement stability, (b) disruption to developmental process, and (c) barriers to fulfilling policy regulation of organization policy and practice.

The interviewees described their frustrations with the lack of resources that impacted the placement decision, appropriate placement, placement stability and the

provision of services. According to most of the participants, having enough foster homes and finding a foster home was their greatest concern when a youth comes into care or when a placement disrupts. Each interviewee described many incidents of youth sleeping in offices or youth placed in foster homes because they were the only homes available.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Throughout the interview process, a sense of trust and bond with the research participants was created by reading and rereading the transcripts to recognize codes, patterns, categories, and themes that emerged from the data, which developed an understanding of the whole (Alase, 2017). Stahl and King (2020) wrote trustworthiness of the research was one wherein the readers and writers found commonality. Readers interpreted the written work, and they gained a sense of confidence in what the researcher had reported (Stahl & King, 2020). Nowell et al. (2017) wrote trustworthiness relied on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Elo et al. (2014) wrote the trustworthiness of a study was the selection of the most appropriate method of data collection that ensured the credibility of the content analysis. Credibility addressed the focus of the research and how well the data addressed the intended focus.

The core element to established credibility was conducting member checks. Nowell et al. (2020) described credibility as addressing the fit between research participants' views and researcher representation of them. Member-checking tested the interpretations and findings with the participant. I attained credibility through participant validation of the interviews as each participant provided professional knowledge of the research topic.

After the interview, I listened to the audio recordings, and made notes of themes that surfaced. Transcribing the interviews required me to listen to their spoken word carefully as I transcribed each interview while being mindful of words or phrase that identified the participant. I forward each participant's transcribed interviews for their feedback, clarification, or additional information. Member-checking consisted of providing the participants with the transcription of their individual interview and requested any feedback, clarity, or corrections. Only 1 participant followed up with additional information.

Transferability was the second factor to trustworthiness that reflected the external validity and generalization. The qualitative study expanded the understanding by transferring results and findings to different settings, contexts, or groups (Stahl & King, 2020). Transferability was a description that provided a full enough representation of circumstance for application others' situations. Transferability relied on the researcher's descriptions that included contextual information. Through a detailed description and description of the data and clear verbalization of the context, readers made informed comparisons by transferring relevant contextual factors (Stahl & King, 2020). The participants' occupation, responsibilities, demographics, and response content established transferability. Using snowball sampling of child welfare professionals from different agencies within the state of Illinois, this sample population expanded validity and lessened the likelihood of systematic bias.

The third factor to trustworthiness was dependability. In a qualitative research study, trust was actively built, allowed for confirmability and transferability while

acknowledged consistency and reliability (Stahl & King, 2020). According to Nassaji (2020) dependability a study must be reported in a manner that other researchers confirmed results and arrived at a similar interpretation. This was completed by carefully documenting all the research steps and the results or changes that occurred as the research evolved. Researchers must be aware of what is recorded as fact and what was set aside as the researcher's interpretive comments about the data. This process of data separation into observations and interpretations is called bracketing.

Matua and Mostert Van Der Wal (2015) wrote that researchers had to bracket, or kept their preconception out of the process, during interviews of participants and collection of research data. The IPA approach was committed to a level of open-mindedness. I began this step with watching for any bias in my interpretation, participants reviewed and confirmed their transcribed interviews. I ensured each participant's interview recording content was precise and correct. I rechecked and reviewed the recordings and transcripts before I imported the transcripts into the NVivo 12 software which organized the common themes found in the collected interviews.

Another aspect of dependability was confirmability; the expectation that qualitative research was neutral and free of bias. The data was accurately represented the information that the participants provided, and interpretations of the data was invented by the researcher (Elo et al., 2014). The goal of reflexive was to document bias or personal beliefs that impacted this data collection or this research. I was aware and noted my own preconceptions, changes, and advancements in this study, I ensured confirmability. Through the NVivo 12 coding tool combined with my documented field notes,

interpretations were derived from the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Throughout the study, I continued to update changes to my preconceptions, setting aside interpreter's bias, I continued my research.

Results

Each of the participants were asked the same 11 questions that focused on their experiences and perspectives of out-of-home placement decisions for dually involved Black girls. The participants were identified and represented as Participant 1 (Pt 1) through Participant (Pt 11). Pt 11 sent in an email with written responses to the interview questions. A following phone call with Pt 11 for member checking was completed. The results are shown through the themes that emerged from their responses to the interview questions. Table 1 provided identified themes and sub themes. Table 2 provided a summary review of the emerged themes from the interview questions.

Three themes developed that related to aspects of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. These themes included the barriers to stability and the disruption to the development process from the micro level to the chrono system. In the following section, themes were described. Table 1 contained themes and sub themes. Table 2 contained quotes for all themes and subthemes described.

Eleven semistructured interview questions were developed from the research problem to understand the challenges that child welfare professionals experienced with placing dually involved Black female youth in foster homes and the impact their decisions had on the youth's developmental process. A greater understanding was

achieved through the natural course of the interview process, additional probing questions were interjected.

After the analysis of the interview transcripts, 3 major themes emerged:

(a) barriers to placement, (b) disruption to development, and (c) barriers to fulfilling policy regulation of organization policy and practice. From these three main themes, several subthemes emerged. Table 2 described each of the 3 major themes and the subthemes that emerged, with corresponding quotes that illustrated the themes. Further narrative was provided after the presentation of Table 1.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

| Themes | Subthemes |
|--|--|
| Barriers to placement | Stereotype, prejudice, and foster parent bias of dually involved Black girls Higher degree of scrutiny by caregivers and professionals Lack of resources Placement stability |
| Disruption to development | Developmental impact of stereotype and bias of dually involved Black girls Development impact of foster care placement and relationship with community acceptance Individual level: cultural identify, race, sense of self, and interpersonal Family level: family, significant others, and relationships connections Community level: social barriers, educational setting, friends, and community life |
| Barriers to fulfilling policy regulation of organization policy and practice | Policy, procedure, and practice Systemic Professional collaboration and system involvement |

Theme 1: Barriers to Placement

Microsystem was the youth's complex of interrelations within the immediate environment; those individuals or family members that the youth lived with or people the youth had daily face-to-face contact, included the youth's school. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems the microsystem provided the processes that influenced the behavioral changes and psychological development of the youth. The microsystem established the interconnectedness of systems and patterns of society, social groups, cultures, organizations, environments for human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Microsystems transactions included perceived discriminations, bias, and stereotypes related to ethnic identity by substitute care givers, included the importance of the proximal relationship process.

Child welfare professionals raised several factors that they felt made it difficult for them to find out-of-home placement for dually involved African American female youth. They reported such barriers even when describing placement with fictive kin, a parent home, relatives, and foster care homes; youth with juvenile delinquency issues were hard to place.

Subtheme: Stereotype, Prejudice, and Foster Parent Bias of Dually Involved Black Girls

Several participants, for example, reported voiced reluctance by foster parents to accept a dually involved Black teen-age girl into their home based on implicit and explicit bias, prejudices, stereotypical notions of Black girls, that they would have negative consequences and impact in the foster parents' home and community. Some

participants expressed that many foster parents would ask about the youth's race, age and juvenile delinquency involvement prior to placement acceptance.

Although many participants indicated that race and juvenile delinquency concerns from foster parents played a role in barriers to placement, gender and age were also barriers to placement. According to Clinton-Sherrod et al. (2019), negative views of African American women in mainstream culture influenced the way that others value and interact with them. These negative stereotypes viewed Black girls as sexually matured angry black women thus this objectification of Black girls contributed to their increased risk of other types of violations such as sex trafficking.

Subtheme: Higher Degree of Scrutiny By Caregivers and Professionals

When discussing placement of dually involved Black girls, participants described biases by foster parents as having caused the foster parent to deny placement or have asked for the youth to be removed from their home. One frequently cited barrier to placement was a foster parent not wanting a teen girl with juvenile delinquency issues in their home. For example, Pt 1 stated, "the foster parents really don't want girls they don't want girls, if they're married or have another males in their home or have their own male children or have other foster children in their home that are males." Pt 7 said, "There's stigma with certain kids that they're so broken."

Other factors included biases, stereotypes, and societal views. Pt 11 said, "The society currently has a negative perception when it comes to African Americans without there being just cause, then to have a female in child welfare, to no fault of her own, and to have juvenile justice involvement enhances all the negative biases already present." Pt

11 said, “Prejudgment because of their attitude, background of aggression.” One participant reported that their behaviors were better with the additional scrutiny by authority. Pt 6 shared, “I would say behavior is better.” Epstein et al. (2017) found that adults viewed Black girls as more adult-like and less innocent and needed less nurturing, protection, support and knew more about sex, received harsher penalties and received greater scrutiny and surveillance of their decorum than White girls.

Several participants made agreeable comments of the disparity in placement and stereotypes of Black girls as literature reported on the racism in the foster care system. The participants discussed their experiences and perspectives of racism and disparity and its impact on placement decision. For example, Pt 11 shared, “some caregivers will disclose that they prefer not to have children outside of their race placed with them. Others are specific in stating they will not have Black children in their home”.

Consistent with research, foster care negatively impacted a child’s social-emotional well-being and for African American youth issues faced in foster care were increased by culture and race related concerns (Jewell et al., 2010). All eleven participants agreed the disparity in placement acceptance by foster parents negatively impacted dually involved Black girls developmental process, their ability to form trusting adult relationships, positive identity development, achieving academic progress and success, forming and maintaining positive family, friends, and social connections. Pt 1 and Pt 9 shared placement decisions take Black girls from their community, their family, friends, school, and place them in unfamiliar surroundings.

Subtheme: Lack of Foster Home Resources and Placement Stability

Flores et al. (2018) discussed living in a stable home allowed youth the ability to form and establish important healthy attachments and bonds; their ability to establish healthy bonds was inhibited by placement instability and disruptions. All eleven participants discussed lack of resources had a significant negative impact on placement stability: the lack of foster homes; the lack of African American foster homes; the lack of service providers and distance in accessing resources. Pt 1 shared, “we don’t have a lot of African American placements.” Pt 1 further explained,

and because of the challenges the system has that we still look at safety there is a lot of pressure to keep children out of the office and understandably so, but the resource is not there to keep them out of the office.

Pt 1, Pt 6, and Pt 8 confirmed the lack of resources. Pt 1 explained the availability of foster homes by stating that “more foster parents in northern region.” Pt 6 best explained the current lack of foster homes by stating “we have no resources, none, I mean if, I’m on call right now if we PC an adolescent female of any race we are not going to have a placement and then they’re gonna be sitting in office while we try to find a placement”; Pt 8 said,

Psychologically how you would get over knowing that nobody wants you. I mean not to mention that sometimes the kids have to sit in the room with the worker while they’re making the phone calls trying to find the placement and all the people want to know, which I can’t blame them, but it’s over and over again

every bad thing the kid has ever done. I mean they have to listen to that. They have to listen to person after person saying no.

Consequently, a variety of unmet needs and developmental processes were expressed as well. For example, some participants reported how basic needs such as privacy, hair & skin care and housing impacted the youth's sense of self-worth and identity. Other participants described the specific efforts by staff to meet the youths' needs; Pt 1 said:

female youth that needed to be placed, she had to come into the office, and one of the workers went to the store and brought hair care products and some hair and braided her hair. Because it was a mess and the girl felt so much better after getting her hair done.

Detention centers standards also highlighted the differences. Pt 3 shared:

I had one girl tell me they can brush through their hair, my hair is kinky, nappy and I don't have hair oil and they we can't that here or I can't do this or I had one who had braids and was taking it out and rebraiding it over and over because they can't hair products other than the shampoo and conditioner. It is it doesn't consider their needs its basically, this is what we're doing and this is it.

Theme 2: Disruption to Development

The negative macrosystem (system-wide), mesosystem (immediate social environment), and microsystem (individual) factors were linked to disruption to a youth's development process. Studies have shown trauma had a significant impact on a youth's development in all domains. At the micro-level trauma symptoms were seen as feelings

of powerlessness, stigmatization surrounding their abuse, feelings of loss, betrayal resulting in struggles with identity, sexuality, challenging authority, conflicts and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. Pt 2 confirmed “they have a harder time earning the trust of the caregivers or service providers, building a solid rapport with them.”

At the mesosystem the lack of social supports, lack of familial support and unsafe family environments increased the dually involved girls’ feelings of being alone and unwanted. Pt 8 shared, “you’re literally taking away everything from them and then you’re wanting them to get better and they’re not going to.” At the exosystem the youth experienced poor community, school violence and neighborhood disruption. Pt 3 best described the effect of resources by stating, “When they return to their community and if the youth has been in therapy and some good trauma informed therapy, some good education, when they go back then they’re an outsider in their community.” Youth in foster care have an increased risk of having low self-esteem, poor academic outcomes, increased mental, emotional, and behavioral health concerns, multiple placement disruptions, poor relationships with adults and nonparental adults (Ahrens et al., 2011).

Consistent with research, foster care can have a negative impact on a child’s social-emotional well-being and for African American youth the issues faced in foster care were increased by culture and race related concerns (Jewell et al., 2010). For example, Pt 2 and Pt 10 discussed the impact of placement disruptions had on relationships. Pt 2 shared, “when you move children there’s a gap in their academics, they’re losing their support system, their friends or relationships.” Pt 10 best described the effect of foster care placement by stating:

The kids feel isolated; they feel they don't have their family or friends near; my client complained about that too; she didn't have anybody that can come up and visit her; her mom lost her car so she can't come visit her. She doesn't have anybody any support and like you know alone.

The Children and Family Research Center (2004) examined the experiences of foster care youth with juvenile delinquency changes and the role foster parents in advocating for a teen in their care. Foster parents contacted police when youth became unruly, the participants discussed foster parents cite behavioral issues as one of the main reasons for placement disruption. Pt 5 shared the impact of trauma, "trauma history the kids' behavior so it makes it difficult for them for foster parents to deal.". Pt 3 explained foster parent's response to behavioral issues, "they use the police for the African American girls to redirect their behavior". Goodkind et al. (2013) reported given the trauma dually involved girls experience increased their placement disruptions. Youth in care experienced trauma and then they are removed from their family and everything and everyone they know. Pt 4 stated, "You are moving them from everything they know from family supports, from friendships, their culture and they should be mad and that causes a lot of the disruptions and difficulties for them." This interpersonal trauma often disrupted the normal developmental process of social development, identity development and sexual development (Fratto, 2016).

Foster care viewed through the ecological lens illuminated the various influences over a youth's life and understood the developmental disruptions that increased dually involved Black girls' risk of being a victim of human trafficking (Sanchez, 2018). Pt 1

described the effect of loss Black girls experienced with coming into care and placement disruption by stating, “Losing their culture losing, their identity, traumatizing them even more by being unsure put so much fear on you; the lack of trust.” All participants discussed the disparity in gender and minority ethnicity and the foster parent’s perception of Black dually involved girls that perpetuated placement disruption and human trafficking among Black girls. Pt 6 shared that the way girls responded to loss:

a lot of the time what leads to them actually getting into trouble and acting out, is there they’re seeking attention, they’re seeking love, they’re seeking attention and they’re doing it the wrong way; that behavior escalates and escalates and gets bigger and bigger and bigger until finally they’re breaking the law. By that point that they’re involved with dually involved system, they think that they’re unlovable.

Pt 3 shared:

another disparity is that for human trafficking it’s like oh this is a child of color, they have joined into this, and this is what they want to do but if it’s a non-child of color, then its oh they were groomed to do it.

The participants found the negative impact of being a dually involved youth increased their loss of normalcy, loss in developed social skills, learning independence, dating, age appropriate social and sports activities, life transitions such learning about body changes during puberty and feminine care, experiencing instability in housing and education. The participants also shared the lack of resources diminished the focus on

permanency, safety and well-being and acknowledged the systemic disparity Black youth and families experienced within the child welfare system. Pt 2 shared,

the label of being a foster child and being on probation. It's just too difficult to overcome. They have no one, they have no positive supports. We need to use more of a strength-based approach with older youth, girls, they want someone to give them love, to give them a little bit of confidence, so they can dig themselves out. I think girls get involve with older men, but I don't know if its power or because they want to be taken care of love to give.

Pt shared the way the mother-daughter relationship was impacted:

how the girls are taught when you live at home and not involved with DCFS, your mother teaches you about being a young lady, womanhood, all of the things, learning about your body, hygiene, and all those things and I feel like those kind of things get lost and then they're supposed to have their medical exams we're not talking about routine physicals, we're talking about learning about routine pelvic exams and things like that, about being sexually active, about how to properly care for yourself during menstrual time, breast exams, those are the physical things that a mother teaches you the caregiving mother or significant woman in your life.

Pt 1 further described the importance of Black girls' hair and skin needs:

hair care just bringing something like that and our black children are without oil; they need some oil, baby oil, jell, bath oil, they've got to have something on their skin. Sometimes people don't think about that they give them lotion. The hair

people are becoming more aware one thing I've noticed it is that we had a female youth that needed to be placed, she had to come into the office, and one of the workers went to the store and bought them hair care products and some hair and braided her hair. Because it was a mess and the girl felt so much better after getting her hair done.

Theme 3: Barriers to Fulfilling Policy Regulation of Organization Policy and Practice

Governmental policies impact the care and accessibility of services and resources for dually involved youth. According to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2020-2024 Child and Family Services Plan (2019) state agency was designated to administer and supervise the administration of child welfare services. Through contract partnerships with private community-based agencies the state agency and community-based agencies provided comprehensive social services and child welfare programs. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems provided a nested level view of dually involved Black girls across the different developmental levels. It was through collaboration among child welfare agencies and juvenile justice professionals to work together and provided services and resources that addressed the needs and concerns of for dually involved Black girls.

Community-based resources and service provisions were available for foster children; however, several organizational factors of the child welfare system and juvenile justice system emerged as barriers to the fulfillment of child welfare policy and practices. Pt 7 stated, "the court and DCFS get in the way of permanency and our job is about

permanency.” For example, Pt 2, Pt 3 and Pt 9 described the challenges they encountered daily to navigate systemic barriers, disparity and challenges while simultaneously following agency policy. Pt 3 shared the way workers viewed policy and practices:

there are policies that state race, and ethnicity shouldn't be a decision when we're placing children. However, although we have that policy and we've defined it, we have people who will not take children that don't look like them. So, while the policy is there, and we have these license providers, it's getting the people who license to adhere to the policy, and it's accepted that they don't adhere to the policy because they say we need the home.

Pt 2 best explained the role of policy and practices have on placement decisions:

from a placement standpoint not really. There's such a shortage of homes even bigger shortage of homes that will take an older youth and that even more narrow when you got probation juvenile justice probation on top of that, so I think right now if we get a yes and we just at this point where we have to run with them.

Pt 9 shared:

There are policies and procedures that definitely, you know, affect that population placement. Well, I'm gonna say, when you're speaking of the older youth that are specially the ages between ages 14 and up. I've had kids that have what they call self-select placements and technically you can't self-select until you're 18. But you have some of these kids that are refusing to go into these foster homes and technically can't self-select, because they don't meet the age criteria. And then not necessarily being the home that we would like to see them in again, but they

have chosen to be somewhere and at least you know, and if they self-select, we are laying eyes on them and we, you know we, can see them. So, it's like you know a catch-22.

Black dually involved adolescent girls experienced disparity and differential treatment and opportunity. Pt 11 stated:

being Black is an automatic barrier, the education system in urban communities is severely lacking making the girls less exposed and cultured (according to societal standards). The placement could have an adverse impact on them as they will feel inferior in a new school district, amongst peers, and in the community (depending on the community in which they are thrust into and the one in which they come from.

When discussing systemic barriers, other participants described several logistical barriers caused developmental disruptions of relationships and stability. One consistent identified barrier was the rural areas of southern Illinois. Pt 8 stated:

I think right now we have such a placement crisis that we don't make good placement decisions. I think that we're desperate and sometimes we do place in some less than favorable situations because we just don't have resources especially for adolescents and then if you compound adolescents with criminal behavior and delinquent behavior and those sorts of things you have even fewer placements.

Another participant, Pt 3 shared:

There are policies that state race, and ethnicity shouldn't be a decision when we're placing children. However, although we have that policy and we've defined it we have people who will not take children that don't look like them so while the policy is there and we have these license providers in getting the people who license to adhere to the policy and it's accepted that they don't adhere to the policy because they say we need the home.

The theme of differences in available services, resources, placement, and visitation in the rural vs urban areas of Illinois emerged from the participants responses to the interview questions. Pt 10 discussed the impact of transporting a youth to visitation:

Well from what I've seen visitation is generally not occurring because, me, personally when I go up to see a kid all the way in Chicago, I don't wanna bring a parent with me if they don't have transportation. I've never seen visitation occur unless the parent has a vehicle and is willing to transport and go to that area that's very far. And even that I've not seen that happening.

Other factors included the lack of collaboration between the juvenile probation officer and the child welfare professional, citing juvenile probation officers have a hands-off approach with dually involved youth. Pt 7 said:

Whether they're DCFS kid or not the probation officers should be case managers and they should be looking out for the best interests of these kids. They should be doing what we do for the most part, but they don't do that. We got kids in-care, sitting in juvenile detention right now and most probation officers are just like hey

these are your rules of probation, here take this court order and go home and behave' and that's it.

Another participant, Pt 9 added,

My experience is it's happened both ways. I've had some great probation officers that try to do the team approach which had worked out better and beneficial if we're working as a team. And then I've had some experiences where it's DCFS, they're DCFS kid, what you're going to do with them. There's no communication, there's lack of communication. So, I'm not aware of what's really going on in the criminal or the probation side of it. So, you know when we're working as a team it always benefits to kids.

According to the policy of DCFS an array of service provision for safety, permanency, and well-being. Social service programs are supportive systems that address mental, emotional, and behavioral health, reuniting families for children and families. In this study, participants discussed systemic barriers in terms of lack of resources, funding, staff shortages and staff turnovers to achieving and fulfilling organizational mandates. Many participants responded that the lack of foster homes diminished the matching of youth to foster homes and keeping a youth in their home school district. Pt 8 stated:

There are no resources. I'm on call so it literally could happen; if we get let's say African American Baptist, special education 14-year-old female with criminal charges right now and we take her into custody, there's no matching, we're not gonna be looking for someone with her religious beliefs, with her culture beliefs, with similar ethnicity, we're gonna be looking for anybody that will say yes, and

that is not fair. But that's what we're faced with doing. Yeah, I mean the way that we're treating our kids in care is criminal, it really is.

All six counties of southern Illinois, the southernmost six counties, there's one Walmart, there's two McDonald's in all of the counties. I mean we're talking rural. There is no public transportation, that's not a thing. Polk County has one school: that's it, one school. You just can't imagine, I mean you just can't imagine these six counties compared to Collar counties or Cook County, they're night and day so the culture shock alone; and the opportunities that the kids have to run because even when a kid runs from here, they're relatively safe. And they don't know how to handle things. Right, they're not street smart at all, they think they are, they are not street smart that is the truth.

Parrish (2020) advised girls involved in the juvenile system needed gender specific program and interdisciplinary teams that ensured proper and appropriate services. Haight (2017) wrote designing comprehensive integrated approaches that involved multisystem collaborations could comprehensively address their needs through coordinated case planning and supervision. All eleven participants agreed that dually involved Black girls were more than their behaviors and deserved treatment to address their trauma and lived experiences. They deserve the opportunity to have a sense of normalcy and stability. Pt 7 explained:

when some of these kids see that everybody's involved school, probation, GAL, caseworker, supervisor, when they see that everybody is hands-on and have everyone be interested in them and their success. I think some of these kids could

potentially turn it around. You know again, especially with the with the right resources.

Although, DCFS has a dually involved program little information was received about the program and their involvement with placement decisions. One participant's response displayed the ideal of community involvement changes with the delinquent youth. Pt 1 shared:

what would make the system better with dually involved youth is they need to strengthen the community to deal with their own problems. There is no abuse nor neglect, this is a problem kid and it's a community issue; it's not a DCFS issue. We have JD cases that don't have any abuse or neglect needs in them, that doesn't mean nothing hasn't happened to them or they haven't experienced trauma such as a parent going to prison, abandon or left with a grandmother, or lack of involvement with their mother, their needs are getting met; but it comes in as a dependency case and then the court automatically hands them to DCFS. And we need to build up the community services so they can deal with problems that are not related to DCFS abuse and neglect. In other words, JD cases should not come into our system if they don't have abuse or neglect or a legal tie to the department, a lot of JD cases dependency are because the parent can't handle the child anymore, so they give him to DCFS to us as 'no fault dependency'. So, they come, and they say DCFS do something with them, and our system is already challenged.

This response indicated the importance of placement decisions and need for multisystem collaboration for improved services and placement decisions for dually involved Black girls. This response supported the literature review of the systematic issues within the child welfare system that influenced and affected Black girls who became involved with both systems (Leathers, et al., 2021). For dually involved girls the child welfare system was the ecological system beyond their family that had the greatest impact on their developmental outcomes. The participants' responses displayed the need for more resources to promote positive developmental outcomes for dually involved Black girls and for policy and practices to promote stability and to meet the developmental needs of dually involved Black girls.

Summary

This study explored the experiences and perspectives of child welfare professionals on the out-of-home decision-making process for dually involved African American female youth. The participants in this study consisted of 11 child welfare professionals, included six supervisors and five service workers from various private child welfare agencies and the state of Illinois child welfare agency. I conducted comprehensive telephone interviews guided by semistructured open-ended questions.

The interview questions were framed in this qualitative study to gain their perspective and experiences with the out-of-home placement decisions of dually involved African American female youth. The foundation for this study was: what is the perspective of child welfare professional on the out-of-home placement decision-making process? What challenges, barriers and strategies are faced by child welfare professionals

in making out-of-home placement decisions? and What strategies and changes do child welfare professionals engage to reduce and overcome possible racial and gender bias to ensure effective placement decision-making?

I used the interpretative phenomenological methodology data analysis for this study. To facilitate the analysis process, I used audio cassette tape recordings, typed transcripts and NVivo 12 software to gain the outcome of the three emerging themes and 12 sub-themes to answer the 11 research interview questions that lead this research study. I reflected and analyzed the data gained from participants responses to the interview questions.

In Chapter 4, I provided the findings received from exploring a sample of 11 child welfare professionals within the state of Illinois child welfare system through data collection and data analysis. I demonstrated trustworthiness through detailed explanation of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In Chapter 5, I provided an interpretation of the overall findings, limitations, recommendations for further research, implications for positive social change and conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Disparity and disproportionality have been a nationwide issue in juvenile justice and child welfare fields, with girls representing the fastest growing population (Haight, 2017). In Illinois, matters of disparity and disproportionality in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems have shown an overrepresentation of minority female youth (Cross et al., 2020; Fuller et al., 2021). Despite growing numbers in both the child welfare system and juvenile justice system, few studies have explored the barriers and disparity experienced by dually involved girls—specifically, African American female youth experiences with out-of-home placement. The goal of this interpretative phenomenological study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of child welfare professionals’ out-of-home placement decision-making process for dually involved African American female youth and the impact of that placement on the developmental process of the dually involved African American female youth.

Data were collected from 11 child welfare professionals who shared their experiences of out-of-home placement regarding dually involved African American female youth and the impact of this on this population. Using a phenomenological approach, I provided child welfare professionals’ the opportunity to describe their experiences in making the out-of-home placement decisions, its impact on the youth’s placement, their developmental process and involvement with out-of-home placement, and the systemic barriers they encounter in finding placement for dually involved African American girls. Using semistructured interview questions, I collected data to explore this

phenomenon and to gain an in-depth understanding of the professional organization practices and policy aspects that shape the decision-making process.

Using IPA and following hermeneutics principles (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2009), I identified emerging themes specific to the placement decision making and surrounding factors associated with the developmental process from the participants' points of view and expertise. The participants' responses highlighted systemic challenges and changes that can influence positive policy and social changes to strengthen the community and reduce barriers to placement and disruption to the developmental process.

Three pilot interviewees assisted me with the snowballing sample process for obtaining voluntary participants. The criteria for the participants required they were child welfare professionals employed by the public child welfare system or a private agency and that they made placement decisions for dually involved African American female youth. The participants in this study were employed by the public child welfare system and private agencies located in the southern region of Illinois. All participants confirmed their employment. Data were collected through semistructured interview questions, telephone communication, audio cassette tape recording of participants, Microsoft Office dictation, and NVivo 12 software. The following research questions helped guide this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of child welfare professionals on the out-of-home placement decision-making process?

RQ2: What challenges, barriers, and strategies are faced by child welfare professionals in making out-of-home placement decisions?

RQ3: What strategies and changes do child welfare professionals engage to reduce and overcome possible racial and gender bias to ensure effective placement decision making?

During data analysis of the data collected from the 11 participants, I identified three primary emerging themes: (a) barriers to placement, (b) disruption to developmental process, (c) and barriers to fulfilling policy regulation of organization policy and practice. I identified 12 subthemes: (a) stereotype, prejudice, and foster parent bias of dually involved Black girls; (b) higher degree of scrutiny by caregivers and professionals; (c) lack of resources; (d) placement stability; (e) developmental impact of stereotype and bias of dually involved Black girls; (f) microsystem individual level: cultural identify, race, sense of self, and interpersonal; (g) macrosystem family level: family, significant others, and relationship connections; (h) exosystem community level: social barriers, educational setting, friends, and community life; (i) policy, procedure, and practice; (j) systemic; (k) professional collaboration and system involvement; and (l) development impact of foster care placement and relationship with community acceptance.

Interpretation of the Findings

The goal of this interpretative phenomenological qualitative study was to gain a comprehensive understanding and advance knowledge of how out-of-home placement decisions impact and affect dually involved African American female youth in the state of Illinois child welfare system. As the researcher, I explored and provided an understanding of how out-of-home placement decision making impacts dually involved African American female youth and how it affects their developmental process. The

research was strengthened by the collected and analyzed data developed from interviews with child welfare professionals. My interpretation of the findings are included in this chapter. The three primary emerging themes and 12 subthemes are grouped together based on common factors of the results. Table 2 displays the grouping of two of the themes and reasons for the grouping. In the discussion, the relationship of the grouping was based on the influence of the theme on the other. This study contributes to the growing body of research that explores dually involved youth.

Table 2

Grouped Primary Themes

| Themes | Reason themes are grouped |
|---|--|
| Barriers to placement Disruption to development | I concluded that the factors of disparity, bias, stereotype, juvenile delinquency, gender, racism, lack of resources, and scrutiny impact and create barriers to placement and the decision-making placement process and how placement instability is connected and impacts the developmental process of African American girls. Based on the findings of no internal or external process to respond to implicit or explicit bias of caregivers, dually involved Black girls are at a higher risk of not being matched to appropriate foster homes. These themes touch on the lack of resources and lack of appropriate foster homes for Black girls and the impact of placement instability on the microsystem and mesosystem of the developmental process. |
| Barriers to fulfilling policy regulation of organization policy and practice | I concluded that the lack of resources has a major impact on policy and practices. The lack of appropriate foster homes that match the girls' cultural identity or ethnic background; the staff shortage and turnover; the lack of basic housing; and the attitudes, preparedness, and bias of foster parents create barriers to policy regulation. |

Barriers to Placement and Disruption to Development

The child welfare system is designed to address and respond to adverse child and family conditions that interfere in children's developmental processes (Lawrence et al., 2006). The child welfare system is designed to provide short- and long-term services, including out-of-home placement to children who are victims of neglect or abuse. In the literature, it has been noted that removing children from their home and placing them in foster care has a negative effect on their developmental process. For youth who are dual involved with both the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system, this compounds the risk for disruption to their developmental process (Haight, 2017).

All the participants discussed at least one concern with the out-of-home placement of Black teenage girls, a finding that exceeded expectations based on data from previous studies of dually involved Black girls. The participants reported the negative qualities of placement and negative impacts to development. Not one participant shared a positive experience with placement. This suggests I captured a broader range of barriers to placement, which was an objective of this study. The types of barriers the participants described for placing a dually involved Black teenage girl (i.e., bias, stereotype, prejudice, scrutiny, resources, and available foster homes) are consistent with those identified in prior studies of dually involved Black girls (Burnett et al., 2022; Marshall & Haight, 2014) as were the disruption to development findings (Lawrence et al., 2006; Robertson-Evans et al., 2014). Similar to the findings of Parrish (2020), Simmons-Horton (2021), and Killeen (2019), participants in this study discussed the barriers and disparity they encounter in placing dually involved Black girls. Thus, it

appears that such barriers, disparity, and disruptions may be significant to minority girls in foster care.

My findings were consistent with results from prior studies, specifically studies that explored the associations between Black girls and foster care. Developmental outcomes indicated the placement decision for dually involved Black girls played a significant role in the disruption of their developmental process which included disruptions to family relationships, academic success, cultural identity, stability, community, interpersonal relationships and socialization as well as those related to safety, permanency and well-being. Several of these disruptions and barriers (instability, interpersonal relationships, academic success and cultural identity) were associated with placement disruption, increased juvenile delinquency, recidivism, human trafficking (Herz et al., 2019; Killeen, 2019; Sanchez 2018), or systemic disparity of minority youth in foster care in prior studies (Johnson, 2021; Kang & Burton, 2014).

There were a limited number of studies that explored the out-of-home placement decision process and its impact on the developmental process of dually involved Black girls from child welfare professionals perspectives. Themes concerned with barriers to placement and disruption to development pertained to race, gender and delinquency characteristics of the youth, and/or the ability of the foster parent to tolerate, understand or adapt to their characteristics. The themes in this area had no culture, racial or ethnic commonality and had a direct impact on stability, development, interpersonal relationships, and academic success. This explained the consistent findings of disruption to development and barrier to placement. The lack of racial, culture, and ethnic

commonality is consistent among Black girls in foster care (Herz et al., 2010; Patrick & Chaudhry, 2017; Ryan et al., 2007). The personal, family, and community dynamics of potential foster parents limited their interpersonal abilities, sensitivity, and understanding of the girls' trauma history, background, and culture were described as barriers to placement. Other factors named as barriers and disruptions pertained to systemic barriers (racial disparity, and/or lack of resources) and delinquency, sense of loss, loss of family, friends, community, privacy, ability to trust strangers and adapt to a new environment. This suggested that the youth's cultural identity, socialization and interpersonal relationship skills were key to placement stability. Finally, some participants indicated that shortage of available placements, resources, logistics, relationships, school, policy, and practices also had an impact on barriers to placement; disruption to development and barriers to fulfilling policy regulation and organization policy and practice also impacted placement decisions. Further findings implications were discussed in the following sections.

Factors that appear, based on the responses of the participants contributed to the placement decision and instability of this population consistently involved systemic concerns, characteristics of the youth or gender and racial bias of the foster parent. This aspect of my findings were caused by the fact that I obtained my data from only the child welfare professional's perspective. Overall, participants identified specific factors as barriers to placement, disruption to development and barriers to fulfilling policy regulations were similar to those cited by other research studies of Black girls, e.g., identity development, relationships, protective role of parental socialization, and

involvement in the juvenile justice system (Burnett et al., 2022; Parrish, 2020).

Furthermore, relationships that were vital to development, child welfare professionals identified several logistical barriers that impacted the relationship or disrupted the relationship. For example, studies have documented the increased use of technology-cell phone and social media-to stay in contact with family and friends (Moore et al., 2018).

My findings were consistent with results from other studies that explored dually involved African American girls' experiences in community and school settings (i.e., internalizing symptoms, school disruptions, lack of academic success or loss of relationships) between when they came into care and multiple placement disruptions. Several of the disruptions (i.e., decreased academic/educational attainment, lower self-esteem, lack of cultural identity) were consistent with those associated with placement disruption (Flores et al., 2018; Hindt & Leon, 2022).

The categories of community disruptions described by child welfare professionals (i.e., removal from neighborhood, church, tangible supports) were consistent with those described in another study of foster care youth, included moves from urban communities to rural communities, loss of community support system, and cultural connections (Ahrens et al., 2011). Similar to Ahrens et al. (2011) study, participants in this study discussed the importance of the youth maintaining connection to their culture, their neighborhood, community connection, relationship and the loss of those relationships were particularly impactful and disruptive to their emotional well-being and developmental process.

Unfortunately, the factors cited by the participants as barriers to placement acceptance and stability, also created disruptions to all levels of their ecological system. Specifically, those involved youth's placement stability, cultural identity, relationships, school and community considerations as well as the child welfare professionals' experiences with placement decisions. Implicit and explicit biases were notably different from barriers and challenges cited in previous research on placement decisions.

Miller et al. (2013) explored foster care decision making, cited individual bias and systemic and structural bias existed and contributed to disparity and disproportionality as reasons why negative perceptions existed at multiple points in the child welfare continuum whether intentional or not which included the organizational routine that unintentionally negatively affected minority youth. These factors were similar in focus to many of the factors described by child welfare professionals in this study to the barriers to placement stability (i.e., foster parent bias, community bias, lack of foster parents and lack of resources). Barriers to placement and disruption to development did not develop if major barriers to placement and resources did not exist. Put another way, similar characteristics of ecological systems were important in development which formed both in and out of foster homes, and placement decisions. However, these factors were important to placement stability (formation of cultural identity and positive interrelationships) in those placements outside of the natural family and community.

On the other hand, the differences between this study's findings and those of earlier studies (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2017; Killeen, 2019; Martin & Esenstad, 2015) also reflected fundamental differences in the responses to placement

decisions. These differences included trauma, criminalized behaviors, school, social and environmental factors which stemmed from early life experiences. Lastly, I noted that systemic disparities, gender bias, racial bias and foster care bias impacted the child welfare professional's placement decision making. In this case, the lack of resources (i.e., lack of African American foster parents and/or culturally sensitive foster parents) influenced both the chances that barriers to placement and development disruption continued and the child welfare professional's placement decision making resulted in placement stability.

All 11 participants discussed barriers to policy, procedures, and practices as written policy was different from practice. This study findings supported the Illinois DCFS policy to place youth close to their home community. Participants indicated the lack of resources as barriers to placement in the youth's community. An earlier study (Damman et al. 2020), noted child welfare systems had the responsibility to ensure the safety of all children that came to their attention and those decision practices directly affected the ability of child welfare agencies to achieve safety outcomes. Yet, safety decisions were not always consistent among workers in the same jurisdiction. This suggested a broader concern with policy and the interest towards safety, permanency and well-being.

The current system described by the child welfare professionals had problems, such as scarce resources, lack of foster homes, lack of African American foster homes and racial disparity. Lack of resources and foster homes to adequately assist in out-of-home placement, dually involved Black girls were not matched nor placed with

appropriate foster parents and substitute placements. Based on the interviews, the participants made placement decisions based on what was available. Policy, procedures and practices that addressed systematic disparities were key components to cultural and community efforts. This was discussed in the next sections.

Interpretations of findings from this study and other studies identified effective factors and strategies to develop policy and procedures to support the placement decision-making process and placement stability for dually involved Black girls in the foster care system. Placement decisions for dually involved Black impacted their developmental process yet child welfare professionals made individual determinations for placement in moments of high emotions with time constraints and limited resources. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the limited prior studies that were available as reference in this area, I framed my interest as questions for future research studies.

Dually involved Black girls in the foster care system consistently experienced overrepresentation, disparity and racism as they moved through the child welfare system (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Killeen, 2019; Martin & Esenstad, 2015; Pryce et al., 2019). I believed it beneficial to examine the ecological system developmental systems as Black dually involved girls moved through the foster care system. There were several potential advantages to this approach as findings from this study noted the importance of cultural identity, supported foster parent training, and strengthening community resources. In addition, the importance of appropriate placement of Black youth in out-of-home placements and putting policy into practice.

Limitations of the Study

Although this present study presented many strengths, limitations to the study must also be considered. There were limitations to this study. First, the findings from this study could not be generalized to all child welfare professionals. Furthermore, all participants in this study came from the one region from the state of Illinois. There was a possibility that some ecological disruptions were minimized by what the child welfare professional was willing to share based on their professional experiences in rural communities and findings may not be applicable to larger urban regions. Secondly, a few of the participants shared they had experience with youth with legal concern but their experiences with dually involved black girls was limited. This influenced the way that I analyzed and interpreted the data. In particular those with more experience with dually involved youth, specifically Black girls, allowed the collection of additional or different themes from the data. Next, participants of this study were child welfare professionals, it was possible that included minimally interaction with dually involved Black girls. I collected different themes frames from the data. Finally, the interviews were conducted were limited to the perspective of the child welfare professionals and did not include clinicians, residential service providers nor system administrators. Accordingly, future research should explores placement decision making at multiple time points and multiple disruptions, the inclusion of foster parents and residential providers would be beneficial.

Recommendations

Research on child welfare professionals' perspectives and lived experiences and impact on the out-of-home placement decisions for dually involved African American

female youth from an ecological systems theory was very limited. Some participants reported limited experience with dually involved girls, having had more experience with males involved with juvenile delinquency. All participants reported that girls, Black girls in particular were subject to higher levels of scrutiny from caregivers and professionals. Existing studies have shown protective factors and risk factors had an impact on recidivism rates of dually involved youth. Research that focused on ecological systems and dually involved girls help determine what types of living arrangement, services, and resources would best benefit their development.

This study discussed the limitations and extent that dually involved African American girls lacked the culture and social support systems that were vital to their development. The findings in the literature review revealed racial minority youth experienced disparity in the juvenile system and child welfare system with longer stays in the foster care and juvenile system. Therefore, improved collaboration and concentrated focus on the ecological system among the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, foster parents, and the African American families is needed. Furthermore, the lack of resources and services identified in the state of Illinois there was an urgency to the out-of-home placement and disparity experienced by African American girls.

Increased attention to the criteria on which out-of-home placement decisions were made and the criteria on which dually involved Black girls were matched is beneficial for substitute care decisions. Based on my findings, placing dually involved Black girls in foster homes that shared a culture or ethnic identity or other meaningful similarities in areas such as culture, race, traditions and experiences was important to their

development. Also, it was beneficial to consider funding, recruiting, and training foster parents with specific training for dually involved youth placement. It was also beneficial to create a forensic foster program specifically for dually involved youth who have no abuse or neglect issues. Recruitment of adults with experience and backgrounds with juvenile system, specifically, specialized training, education, patience and understanding to bond effectively with juveniles with delinquency issues is important to placement stability.

Additionally, my findings suggested the value of considering the ecological systems in the placement decision-making process. Within the nesting system of the ecological system, there was evidence of the importance of building from one level to another with regard to issues stability, self-esteem, culture identity, friends, socialization, academic success, community and family relationships. It suggested during adolescence racial socialization and relationships were valuable. The relationship between Black girls and mothers supported pathways that promoted healthy identities and protections against negative effects of discrimination (Burnett et al., 2022).

Additional research to explore the above-mentioned recommendations should be undertaken using appropriate questions and methodology. Exploratory studies should be conducted with the purpose of informing the development of placement decisions, foster homes, programs and collaborative teams of other stakeholders and shareholders. Subsequent studies could yield reliable data that impact system change, thus, creating different outcomes, creating trust, and accountability.

Implications

The findings and recommendations of this research study in connection with public policy administration, demonstrated there was a need focus to the current child welfare system, policy and procedure for out-of-home placement decisions of all children involved in the child welfare system; specifically, Black dually involved girls. The child welfare system's lack of resources (i.e., lack of foster homes and lack of minority foster parents/homes) is an issue that had a tremendous impact on the placement decision by the child welfare professional. This lack of resource diminished the matching process for appropriate foster homes and diminished the placement of youth in their home school district.

First, social change efforts to influence the supportive efforts for cultural differences for foster parents and youth. Second, education and support is needed for girls in out-of-home placements with their developmental needs and preparing foster parents to address and respond to those needs. Third, recruiting foster parents' that are supportive to girls' needs to fit in and make friends. Fourth, placing youth with caring foster parents and addressing any monetary incentives of foster care. For instance, the child welfare professional engages in a discussion about the challenges of girls' behaviors and the foster parents' expectations of girls in their home or discussions about how to help dually involved girls build their self-esteem. Lastly, efforts to address systemic disparity concerns that influence procedure and policy implementation to reduce disproportionate and negative outcomes for African American foster care girls. In terms of policy and procedural changes, increasing funding for foster home recruitment with specific criteria

for dually involved youth, adding a collaborative multidisciplinary forensic unit for dually involved youth without legal ties to the child welfare system, strengthen the community-based programs to respond to families and youth with juvenile delinquency concerns. A diversified collaborative team with cross training could create a substantive system and social change. A collaborative team could cultivated an environment of culture sensitivity and humility through an inclusive approach; thus, highlighting that everyone is part of the solution. This inclusion creates an environment that embraces inclusion and equity. Inclusion and equity should exist across the system. Through inclusion, we build a sense of belonging and we experience equity and fairness that fosters a stronger understanding and strengthens the system.

As a researcher and a professional in the social service field, one of my main goals is to ask questions and acquire knowledge that can make a positive change and has a positive social impact. This study is consistent with the goal of positive social change as it sought to explore the experiences of child welfare professionals in making out-of-home placement decisions for dually involved African American girls. The findings from this study provided a wealth of information to help the state and community-based agencies to implement policies and services to improve services to foster care youth.

Creating positive social change is one of the goals of conducting research. Efforts for positive social change help to strengthen communities, address systemic barriers and contribute to the development of African American dually involved girls. A change in understanding cultural differences and minimizing stereotypical ideologies is a positive indication that research is important to positive social change.

Child welfare professionals and policy makers would learn from the information gained from this study with implementing practices that produced effective and supportive collaborations between community-based services, administrative system and families for dually involved youth.

Conclusion

Overall, my findings indicated the decision-making process for out-of-home placement was important to the developmental process of children. The barriers to placement (instability) represented disruption to the development for dually involved Black girls. Other factors and elements were also involved in disrupting existing ecological systems; however, resources and positive social change led to stability and development over time and increased value and positive outcomes for these same communities.

This study highlighted the importance of the ecological systems in out-of-home placement decisions to inform child welfare professionals, juvenile justice professionals, research, and policy implementation. This study suggested that maintaining dually involved Black girls' connection to their culture, home community, school, family and friends was important to their well-being and development. In this study, barriers to placement were related to increasing, internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Future research should explore the quality of disruptions and the affect and impact on dually involved Black girls and their development and well-being (cultural identity, self-esteem, academic achievement, relationship and social connections and functioning).

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

In your professional opinion what do you think may account for the pathway from child welfare system to juvenile justice involvement?

1. In what ways do you think dually involved girls have a higher degree of scrutiny by care givers, and services providers?

2. What is the relationship between substitute care, out-of-home placement, length of stay in out-of-home placement, the number of placement disruptions, and location of placement and race of dually involved girls?

3. Are there any policies or practices that you feel play a role in placement decisions?

3a. How does racial / bias affect placement and care givers?

4. Describe some challenges and barriers you have encountered in placing dually involved Black girls?

4a. Follow up interview question: What are your professional experiences with dually involved girls and their probation/juvenile officer

4b. In what ways is placement decisions a collaborative effort?

4c. What are some of the disparity and systematic barriers, concerns and needs you've noticed or encountered?

5. What are some of the challenges for dually involved girls facing placement disruption?

5a. What are the school concerns moving a child from their home school, community/neighborhood, peers and family?

5b. How are these connections, relationship and bonds maintained or re-established when a child returns to their natural family and community?

5c. What consideration is given to natural parents and natural support systems when a dually involved youth is placed a long distance from their natural family?

6. In what ways are the behaviors you encounter from the African American dually involved girls different or similar from her counterparts?

7. What changes or improvement do you think are needed to change or impact the out-of-home placement of dually involved youth?

8. In what ways do you think the child welfare system and juvenile justice system policy for dually involved girls' impact or affect their racial/ethnicity/identity?

9. How do girls fare in the dual involved system?

10. What social barriers and challenges do you think dually involved girls encounter in out-of-home placement, school, peers, community?

11. What social concern, and needs exist that prevent African American dually involved girls from being stable in substitute care?