SIBLING PLACEMENT IN FOSTER CARE:

EXPLORING THE CONTEXT AND POSSIBILITY OF SIBLING SEPARATION

by

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Abstract

Sibling placement in foster care has long been a contentious topic of discussion. The

decision or desire to place siblings together when they must enter foster care has been

based on policies, procedures, and strong preferences of child welfare agencies. There is

much literature and research supporting the practice of placing siblings together; however

little empirical research examining the context and possibility of sibling separation as it

relates to foster parent and social worker perceptions has been conducted. Research based

primarily on mixed methods of quantitative and quantitative aspects was undertaken and a

small online survey conducted exploring: the experiences of foster parents caring for

sibling groups in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL); the conditions under which separating

siblings support the development of each child in the sibling group; and what foster parents

and social workers think about separating siblings who are in care in the same home.

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Finally, I would like to extend a special thank you to each of the respondents. Without your interest and participation, this research would not have been possible. More importantly, I would not have had the opportunity to learn more about the context and possible benefits of separating siblings who are in foster care, nor would I have had the chance to share my new understanding and learning with others.

Dedication

This thesis is being dedicated to the memory of my parents, Shirley and Gerald Whalen. I think of and thank them every day for their guidance and instilling in me to pursue each and every dream and aspiration I have. I love you today and always.

"Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars".

- Les Brown

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CHAPTER 1

Child Welfare and Foster Care Placement

Child welfare agencies provide services designed to promote the well-being of children by ensuring their safety, strengthening families to successfully care for their children, and seeking permanency when needed (Anderson, 2013; *Children and Youth Care and Protection Act*, 2010; Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development [CSSD], 2011; Fowler, 2008; Hutchison & Charlesworth, 2000; Zell, 2006). Child protection services range from "measures, such as referring families to community services and supporting families in the home, to the most invasive measures of removing children from their parents" (Anderson, 2013, p. 1). One of the main reasons children enter foster care is due to abuse or neglect by their caregivers' including physical, psychological, social, emotional or sexual maltreatment. Hegar (1986, p.1) suggests that "environmental stress; parent lack of child and home-management skills; unsafe physical environment; parent absence or isolation; parental illness or inability to cope with family needs; disciplinary practices; and lack of material resources" are the primary reasons for children's removal from their homes.

Failed institutional policy and systemic biases such as stereotypical assumptions and biases grounded in racism, ageism, sexism, heterosexism, among others, also factor into children entering foster care and an over-representation in some cases (Black, Heyman, & Smith Slep, 2001; Gosine & Pon, 2011). Racial stereotyping is the primary reason for the over-representation of Aboriginal and African Canadian in foster care (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001; Corneau & Stergiopoulos, 2012; de Montigny, 2013; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Mullings, 2010; 2012; Pon, 2009; Sinclair, 2004). In addition, children in lone parent families, and families of lower socio-economic status (Afifi, Taillieu, Cheung, Katz, Tonmyr,

& Sareen, 2015; Black et al., 2001; Curenton, McWey, & Bolen, 2009; Dumbrill, 2003; Gosine & Pon, 2011; Hutchison & Charlesworth, 2000; Rodriguez-JenKins & Marcenko, 2014) are frequently removed from their caregivers due to bias. A larger discussion of biases in child welfare practices is beyond the scope of this research; however, it is important to acknowledge and recognize that children enter foster care for several reasons, some of which are steeped in systemic and worker discrimination towards the families.

Social workers in child welfare agencies must make difficult decisions pertaining to children, when they are unable to remain safely with their caregivers. They must decide if services can be provided to support caregivers so that children can remain in their homes or if children need to be placed in foster care. Legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) promote the concept of "the best interest of the children"; therefore, policy dictates that when determining the best interests of children, all relevant factors shall be considered, including the children's, safety, health and well-being; physical, emotional and developmental needs; relationship with family or significant persons to the child; identity, cultural and community connections; opinion regarding children's care and custody or service provision; and the importance of stability and permanency in the context of their care (*Children and Youth Care and Protection Act*, 2010, s.9; CSSD, 2011; 2014a; Fowler, 2008). In addition to legislative guidelines, social workers and decision-makers (e.g. administrators) in child welfare agencies are required to engage in a planning process to find appropriate placement for children who enter foster care. The choices of where children can be placed is challenging when they are part of a sibling group.

Literature pertaining to siblings in foster care is limited (Boer & Spiering, 1991; Church, 2012; Cutler, 1984; Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2010; Hegar, 1988; Kim, 2001; Leathers, 2005; Perlman, 1967; Pfouts, 1976; Rees & Pithouse, 2014; Shlonsky, Webster, &

Needell, 2003; Staff & Fein, 1992; Stocker, 1994). Since the 1930's there has been a growing body of research about siblings; however, many of these studies focus on aspects of the family constellation (Bank & Kahn, 1997; Cutler, 1984; Hegar, 1986), rather than siblings themselves. The disregard of sibling and their concerns in the literature begs the question: is there is a general lack of professional awareness of this group of children and their relationships? Relatively few researchers have address the nature of sibling relationships but even fewer have considered the effects of foster care and sibling separation (Cutler, 1984; Hegar, 1986; Timberlake & Hamlin, 1982; Ullmann-Gheri & Weiss, 2013).

Separating siblings when they enter foster care has been a contentious and debated topic for those working in child welfare. There is a presumption that children entering foster care must be placed with their siblings; however, there is little consensus concerning the advantages and disadvantages of sibling joint placement (Hegar, 1986; Leathers, 2005; McCormick, 2010; Rothschild & Pollack, 2013). Many researchers support the view that siblings need to remain together when they are placed in foster care and have discussed support for joint sibling placement (Berg, 1957; Depp, 1983; Hegar, 1988; Smith, 1996; 1998; Ward, 1984; Washington, 2007; Whelan, 2003), as well separating siblings (Adler, 1970; Boer & Spiering, 1991; Hegar, 1986; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2011; Leathers, 2005; Linares, Li, Shrout, Brody, & Pettit, 2007); however, there is no clear direction about whether research clearly provide evidence for one or the other method of supporting sibling groups in foster care.

Much of the literature supports siblings' joint placement but are there certain circumstances which should dictate the separation of siblings? Research suggest that some factors for separating siblings in foster care include: the size of the sibling group (Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Kosonen, 1996; Leathers, 2005); age gap between siblings (Drapeau, Simard,

Beaudry, & Charbonneau, 2000; Hegar, 1988; 2005; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Smith, 1996;

1998; Thorpe & Swart, 1992; Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005); differences in the needs of one

or more siblings (Boer & Springer, 1991; Drapeau et al., 2000; Hegar, 1988; Leathers, 2005;

Rothschild & Pollack, 2013; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Ward, 1984); behavioral issues (Church,

2013; Cross, Koh, Rolock, & Eblen-Manning, 2013; Leathers, 2005; Rothschild & Pollack,

2013; Smith, 1996; Whelan, 2003); adequacy of placement resources and supports

(Kosonen, 1996; Leathers, 2005; Revans, 2007); and the agencies' mandate regarding the

number of children that can be placed in any one foster home (Albert & King, 2008; Child

Welfare Information Gateway [CWIG], 2013; Hegar, 2005; Rees & Pithouse, 2014; Shlonsky

et al., 2003; Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005).

As discussed previously, research generally supports joint sibling placement but

some have explored the possibility and context for separating siblings in foster. Studies that

explore joint placement report mixed results ranging from siblings faring better when

placed with siblings; poorer outcomes; or showing either no difference or mixed outcomes

(Connell, Vanderploeg, Flaspohler, Katz, Saunders, & Tebs, 2006; Davidson-Arad & Klein,

2011; Hegar, 1986; 2005; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009; Leathers, 2005; McCormick, 2010;

Rothschild & Pollack, 2013). These mixed findings, plus the lack of research around sibling

separation in the foster care system, highlight the lack of sufficient knowledge to answer

questions of whether siblings placed jointly or separately actually make a difference.

Situating Myself in the Research

Undertaking this research has been of a personal and professional interest. I am a

social worker in the foster care and adoptions area working with children who are in the

care and custody of the provincial child welfare agency in NL. Working with these children

has become much more than employment for me; over the years, my work has provided me with an abundance of knowledge and skills in working not only with children and their families, but also sibling groups. As previously discussed, much of the research and literature about siblings in foster care point to the primary aspect of keeping siblings together and the importance of placing them together in the same foster home; however, my employment has provided me with the opportunity to work with sibling groups, and has allowed me to consider that sometimes jointly placing siblings in the same foster home may not always be an appropriate or acceptable measure for each member of the sibling group. My work experience has also contributed to my awareness that siblings have complex needs which must be considered during deliberations about placement.

As a professional, it is sometimes a struggle to make choices to support siblings which are in opposition to the norms and expectations of the larger institutional practices especially when alternatives are under researched and therefore unsupported. Baines (2011) discusses, that "competing groups represent a wide range of political perspectives and strategies for change. Social workers differ deeply over whether to support the status quo, what political perspective to adopt, whether strategies for change are justified, and if so, which one and to what degree" (p. 6). I struggle with this very concept in relation to my personal ideals, compared to what is acceptable and can be accomplished while adhering to institutional policies. I have had the opportunity to develop relationships with foster children and siblings and these experiences have left me to contemplate some of the decisions that social workers make on behalf of, and for children in foster care. The struggle to optimally help ensure their safety and well-being often leaves me feeling ineffectual and as if there was more I could do.

Balancing personal and professional values, ideals, and biases with those of the agency is a struggle that is real. My work is grounded in wanting to do what is best for the families and children I work with; however, good intentions are often challenged by agency norms, policies, practices, and standards (Anglin, 2002; Bednar, 2003; Collings, 2008; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Herbert, 2002; Hutchison & Charlesworth, 2000; Jones, 2001). I am motivated to expand my knowledge and understanding of siblings in foster care within the context of placement. This research has been intended to bring together my professional interest in a manner that would not only benefit my practice, but also the larger agencies and governing bodies that also work with siblings in foster care.

Continuing my education through the Master of Social Work program, has given me the luxury of exploring resources and critically thinking about siblings in foster care, in a way that would not have been possible while being actively involved in the day to day activities as a social worker. I recognize that foster care will certainly continue as an alternative living arrangement for children when the family unit cannot be maintained by preventative and protective services; however, there is a necessity for heightened awareness and focus on sibling placement in foster care that reaches further than the current accepted practice of child welfare agencies. This equates to conducting more thorough research in this area.

In my role as a social worker in the child welfare system, I have worked with and supported children, youth, families, and foster parents from differing backgrounds, including race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Embarking on this research, I felt compelled to ensure I viewed my role as a researcher examining the perceptions of foster parents and social workers pertaining to siblings in foster care. However, through the process of critical thinking, it became obvious that as a professional, multiple perspectives

influence my practice, and my research. My own perceptions and assumptions as a

practitioner and researcher could not allow me to be objective and crucial to my growing

awareness of these conflicting approaches, I felt it necessary to locate myself socially.

The concept of locating myself socially brings with it a variety of mixed feelings. It is

not a pleasant experience to examine myself and how I am constructed, particularly in the

impact I may have on others, or in relation to how I am personally being impacted. As an

individual I am socially located and constructed in several relationships that empower and

provide me with privileges, as well as disempower and oppress me. My worldviews are

individualized, the meanings I have about experiences are subjective, and all are socially

constructed, which plays a significant role to influencing my personal and professional

work. My professional and personal perspectives are shaped by a variety of factors,

including: childhood environment, class, education, race, health status and gender. In my

experience living and working amongst mostly white middle class, able-bodied, individuals,

recognizing the privileges that I hold are uncommon practice. Society has constructed

dominant discourses that help to maintain privileges and simultaneously create barriers

that help to perpetuate oppression and I benefit from these situations because of my

membership within some of these social groups (Fook, 2012; Mullaly, 2009).

In terms of my own social location, I self-identify as a white, heterosexual, married,

middle class, disabled, female social worker. These characteristics, which are only a portion

of my social location, provide me with privileges, but also create oppression; they allow me

to speak or they silence me; they dictate where I am and who I am associated with; and they

allow me to be heard or not heard. My experiences of my own complex identity are often

contradictory and conflictual. Ultimately, my social location pushes me to confront

questions of loyalty to individuals and groups around me. The perceptions I hold and those

held by individuals around me are difficult to ignore. Overall, my social location helps to

define who I am and how I practice. As a social worker, there is the underlying assumption

that I have a well-rounded and in-depth understanding of social issues facing individuals I

work with. In critically viewing these social issues and my understanding of them, it is

obvious that I still have much to learn, recognize and acknowledge. Although difficult to

present, it is important for me to do so to confront my social identities, deconstruct my

personal ideologies, and develop a commitment to social justice (Mullings, 2013).

I was raised in what is perceived as a typical white middle-class family and have

worked within the child welfare field for seven years. My work experiences have allowed

me to become aware that the children, youth, and siblings in foster care come from very

backgrounds which are different from my own. Not only have I become aware of the

socially constructed difference between the children and youth with whom I work, but also

those of foster parents and social workers with whom I interact and collaborate with. One

of the obvious constructs that I have recognized is that of expert, which appears to be an

unchallenged and customary practice with being a social worker. The field of child welfare

is one that is characterized by power. Social workers hold the fate of children, parents, and

families in the palm of their hand, and exercise this power when family's outcomes do not

meet those of the neo-liberal, professional ideology. Social workers enter the lives of

families, regardless of culture or race, impose their white, Western-world values and biases,

and base their professional work primarily on those values (Dumbrill, 2003; Gosine & Pon,

2011). Little regard is given for the historical and social impacts that families experience.

Recognizing the existence of these barriers allows space for a beginning engagement of

critically reflecting on practice. Rethinking power includes challenging the ways that both

social workers and society in general participate in oppression and therefore keep it alive

either through a failure to deconstruct the families' experiences or through an attempt to be neutral (Brown, 2012).

Professional Experiences with Separating Siblings

In researching the many facets of the foster care system and particularly, siblings in foster care, I began to reflect on my own professional experiences and recall some of the significant sibling relationships of foster children I have worked with. In my work with various groups of siblings, I have seen both joint and separate placements. What became quite clear with many these siblings was their genuine concern for their brothers and sisters; their concern for them preceded and often exceeded concerns for themselves; and evidence of the parenting role, which had been undertaken by older siblings from a very young age. In this caregiver role, older siblings were attempting to address behavioral, academic, and developmental concerns of the younger siblings. When placed together in foster care, these same older siblings continued this role, which significantly impacted their own development as well as the development of the younger siblings. Considering these complicities, decisions were made to separate the siblings. With this separation, social workers could work individually with the siblings including: the recognition of individual behavioral and developmental needs of the children; implementation of services to address the needs; the development of more positive sibling relationships with their continued contact; and reports from the children of feeling safe, happy, and content that their siblings were also safe.

In addition to my work experiences with siblings in foster care, I was also motivated to undertake this research as an opportunity to provide an avenue for foster parent and social workers involved with siblings in foster care, to voice their opinions, experiences, and

concerns without negative consequences, where no such venue currently exists. Often

differing ideas and opinions from those who closely work with children in foster care are

not well accepted (Collings, 2008; Mullings, 2010). Those attempting to voice their opinions

often face backlash or are simply ignored. Foster parents and social workers in the child

welfare system do have first-hand knowledge and experiences that could inform practice

and challenge agency standards; however, they are often not voiced out of fear,

repercussion, or lack of respect from social workers regarding their opinions about children

they are caring for (Brown & Calder, 1999; Mullings, 2012; Swartz, 2004).

Significance of the Research

As a social worker, my perspective tends to focus on the gathering of information;

however, as a researcher my interest is not just in the information, but also in the context

within which the information has been gained and the influence that this context has on this

information. As a researcher, I have taken a step beyond the position of that of a social

worker and focused my interest on the social context in which the data is gathered; the

specific meaning of the words within that context; and the influence that the context and I

as a researcher, have on the nature of the data collected.

Research and literature in relation to the context and possibility of separating

siblings when entering, or while in foster care, has been noted as being quite limited. Most,

if not all, child welfare agencies place emphasis on the practice of placing siblings together

when they enter foster care, and attempt to keep them placed in the same foster home

during their time in the system (Church, 2013; Timberlake & Hamlin, 1982; Whelan, 2003).

A fundamental research focus is lacking in this area. It has not been until recent years that

literature has begun to identify circumstances that may indicate siblings need to be placed

separately (Adler, 1970; Albert & King, 2008; Boer & Spiering, 1991; Church, 2013; CWIG,

2013; Drapeau et al., 2000; Hegar, 1986; 1988; 2005; Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Kosonen,

1996; Leathers, 2005; Rees & Pithouse, 2014; Revans, 2007; Rothschild & Pollack, 2013;

Shlonsky et al., 2003; Smith, 1996; 1998; Thorpe & Swart, 1992; Ward, 1984; Whelan, 2003;

Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005) and focus has been growing to identify that "the sibling

relationships of children in out-of-home care have slowly become an important focus for

child welfare research" (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009, p. 670).

By engaging in critical thinking, and through the process of recognizing alternatives

to the current literature, I am interested in examining the perceptions that are currently

held regarding sibling placement in the same foster home and if this is congruent with some

of the limited research that identifies joint placement may not always be in the best interest

of children, nor always meet their individual needs. Sibling connections and bonds are

extremely important in fostering healthy and appropriate attachments and relationships

(Bank & Kahn, 1997; Bonacci, 2012; CWIG, 2013; Drapeau et al., 2000; Farris-Manning &

Zandstra, 2005; Hindle, 2000; Leathers, 2005; Ullmann-Gheri & Weiss, 2013); however, in

further consideration do these sibling connections automatically equate to placing siblings

in the same foster home?

Through this research, thoughts and perceptions around the context and possibility

of sibling separation, from the viewpoint of foster parents and social workers, will be

gathered and documented, guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the

experiences of foster parents caring for siblings and social workers supporting siblings in

NL? (2) Under what conditions would separating siblings support the development of each

child in the sibling group? (3) What do social workers and foster parents think about the

idea of separating siblings who are in foster care? The goals of the study are: (1) to suggest

recommendations to stakeholders and the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development (CSSD); (2) to share the findings with stakeholders and CSSD; and (3) to document the perception of foster parents and social workers in NL's child welfare system. Promoting family preservation is important; however, there are times and situations where separating family members, including siblings, can be in the best interest of the children (Whelan, 2003).

Context of the Research

As noted earlier, literature about placing sibling groups jointly or separately in foster care has been controversial, limited and not adequately explored (Boer & Spiering, 1991; Church, 2012; Cutler, 1984; Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2010; Hegar, 1988; Kim, 2001; Leathers, 2005; Perlman, 1967; Pfouts, 1976; Rees & Pithouse, 2014; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Staff & Fein, 1992; Stocker, 1994). Relatively few studies have been devoted to understanding the experiences of siblings in foster care, why siblings are separated, or the potential consequences of this separation. The nature of the research itself has gaps and limitations particularly around defining siblings and clearly identifying what constitutes placement together (Albert & King, 2008; Church, 2013; Kernan, 2005; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Staff & Fein, 1992; Washington, 2007; Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005). Given the lifelong support that sibling relationships provide, it is important to understand the issues, complexities, and potential outcomes that foster care has on these sibling groups (Davidson-Arad & Klein, 2011; Hegar, 1988; 2005; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009; Leathers, 2005; McCormick, 2010; Rothschild & Pollack, 2013).

Siblings, Bonds, and Relationships

Perlman (1967) suggests that siblings can be partners, rivals, competitors, supporters and parental substitutes. Research, including earlier studies, has neglected the significance of sibling relationships (Hegar, 1988; Milevsky & Levitt, 2005; Perlman, 1967; Pfouts, 1976; Rees & Pithouse, 2014; Singer, 2002; Stocker, 1994). Part of the issue is due to the difficulty in defining what sibling means, as the relationships between siblings are a complex and constitutes a major subsystem of the family (Church, 2013; Cicirelli, 1982; Dunn, Slomkowski, Beardsall, & Rende, 1994; Gamble, Yu, & Kuehn, 2011; Groza, Maschmeier, Jamison, & Piccola, 2003; Hegar, 1988; Hindle, 2000; Kernan, 2005; McCormick, 2010; Pfouts, 1976; Sheehan, Darlington, Noller, & Feeney, 2004; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Singer, 2002; Ullmann-Gheri & Weiss, 2013; Washington, 2007). Defining a sibling group is difficult since biological ties may not be the sole indicator of such a group. "The meaning of 'sibling' goes well beyond that of family values and legal status, and in all languages and cultures, the words 'sister' and 'brother' have important meanings" (Hollows & Nelson, 2006, p. 307). Another layer of complexity is in defining siblings, especially when children have lived in more than one family. The CWIG (2013) found that, "children's definitions of their siblings often differ from those of case workers or official legislative definitions" (p. 2) and that children are much less formal than adults in their view of who constitute their brother and/or sister. Research suggest that being biologically related or being a full, half, or step-sibling is not associated with children's perceptions of sibling closeness (Drapeau et al., 2000; James, Monn, Palinkas, & Leslie, 2008; Sturgess, Dunn, & Davies, 2001). While laws and policies may have definitions that restrict siblings (i.e. typically requiring a biological parent in common), "child and family centered practice

respects cultural values and recognizes close, non-biological relationships as a source of support to the child" (CWIG 2013, p. 2).

The nature and importance of sibling relationships vary for individuals, depending on their own circumstances and stage of developmental. Kosonen's (1996) study of sibling emotional support, found that children seek out their parents first when they needed help or reassurance; however, children also turn to older siblings for support. Sibling relationships promote resilience and ties between them become closer when they help each other through adversities (Branje, Van Lieshout, Van Aken & Haselager, 2004; CWIG, 2013; Groza et al., 2003; Guo & Wells, 2005; Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982; Ullmann-Gheri & Weiss, 2013; Wojciak, McWey, & Helfrich, 2013). In short, siblings have a shared history and maintaining their bond provides continuity of their self and family identity is crucial for creating a sense of emotional safety (Bank & Kahn, 1997; Boer & Spiering, 1991; Drapeau et al., 2000; Grigsby, 1994; Hindle, 2000; Shlonsky et al., 2003).

Hindle (2000) discusses the important role that siblings play for each other while in the child welfare system; however, little is known about siblings in foster homes. In the past two decades, researchers have begun to examine the importance of sibling support and connectedness across their lifespan and have noted that siblings provide an important source of social support, friendship, and instrumental support to one another (Albert & King, 2008; CWIG, 2013; Groza et al., 2003; Gou & Wells, 2005; Hegar, 1988; James et al., 2008; Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982; McCarthy; 2014; Smith, 1996; 1998; Timberlake & Hamlin, 1982; Ullmann-Gheri & Weiss, 2013; Waid, 2014; Washington, 2007; Wojciak et al., 2003). Sibling relationships take on a special meaning when children are removed from their own home and placed in foster care, and even if children are placed together, "new parent figures and different home environments undoubtedly affect the sibling

relationship" (Cutler, 1984, p. 11). The loss of natural supports coupled with guilt and grief

regarding the separation from siblings may aggravate the already traumatic situation (Gong,

Li, Fang, Zhao, Lv, Zhao & Stanton., 2009; Timberlake & Hamlin, 1982; Waid, 2014).

Placement Considerations

For children who are unable to live with their caregivers, and placed in foster need

foster homes. Foster care placement, by its very nature, disrupts the family and sibling

systems. "When a child is separated from his/her siblings in foster care, drastic changes

occur for the child, the parents, the foster family, and the sibling system. As with any

change, a disrupted system must adapt to new conditions to survive" (Cutler, 1984, P. 91).

Per Statistics Canada (2015), 70,640 children between the ages of birth and 19 years

were living in foster care in Canada in 2011. As of December 31, 2014, the foster care

system in NL serviced 940 of the children and youth; of that number, there were 620

residential placements consisting of foster homes, group homes, emergency placement

homes, alternative and individualized living arrangements, and out-of-province

facilities/programs. A total of 765 children and youth were placed in 565 foster homes

around the province (CSSD, 2014a; 2014b). Given these numbers in addition to the

complexities in children's lives and shortage in appropriate foster homes, child welfare

social workers will likely continue experiencing challenges placing children.

Joint sibling placements. When siblings are placed in foster care, social workers

have historically advocated for placing them together (Church, 2013; Timberlake & Hamlin,

1982; Whelan, 2003). This has been a child welfare guiding principle, primarily because it

is believed that "placements together can enable siblings to better cope with the feelings of

separation and loss" (Albert & King, 2008, p. 533) and that "being with brothers and sisters

promotes a sense of safety and well-being, while being separated from them can trigger

grief and anxiety" (CWIG, 2003, p. 5). The nature of sibling relationships becomes an

important factor in assessing the family's functioning when determining placement needs of

children coming into foster care, and it is important to protect these ties as they offer

support to children removed from their original families (Branje et al., 2004; CWIG, 2013;

Groza et al., 2003; Gou & Wells, 2005; Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982; Ullmann-Gheri & Weiss,

2013; Wojciak et al., 2013). However, it is important to realize that sibling relationships

vary greatly in both positive and negative qualities and that there is little consistency in the

practice of placing sibling groups in foster care (Cutler, 1984).

Clinical judgments have been used to justify separating siblings but have not

necessarily been centered on best practices. One of the most challenging limitations in

attempting to keep sibling groups together in foster care evolves around limited resources.

Foster homes in NL are lacking in all areas of the province (CSSD, 2014a; 2014b; Fowler,

2008). It is difficult to find foster homes willing to care for siblings as their decisions to do

so are contingent on the availability of physical space; social locations such as age or gender

to which the family is willing to provide care; behavioural issues of one or more siblings;

and siblings not integrating into the foster family (Albert & King, 2008; Anderson, 2013;

Brown & Bednar, 2006; Brown & Calder, 1999; 2000; Church, 2013; Cross et al., 2013;

Kosonen, 1996; Leathers, 2005; Leichtentritt, 2013; Leschied, Rodger, Brown, den Dunnen,

& Pickel, 2014; Linares et al., 2007; Revans, 2007; Rothschild & Pollack, 2003; Smith, 1996;

1998; Whelan, 2003; Whiting & Huber, 2007). Foster parents also cite challenges in being

able to care for foster siblings which include lack of social worker, agency, formal, and

inform supports; lack of information about the roles and responsibilities as foster parents in correlation to the agency as well as information about the foster siblings; lack of training to address the needs of foster children; cultural differences; as well as their own health and personal issues (Anderson, 2013; Barbell & Freundlich, 2001; Brown, 2007; Brown & Bednar, 2006; Brown & Calder, 1999; 2000; Fowler, 2008; Leschied et al., 2014; Mullings, 2012; Whiting & Huber, 2007). Sadly, often "brothers and sister are separated because the system cannot accommodate the best interests of the children rather than for any child-centered reason" (CWIG, 2013, p. 8).

Much of the research shows positive implications for siblings being jointly placed in foster care. This evidence suggests that siblings placed together are more likely to experience placement stability (Leichtentritt, 2013; Staff & Fein, 1992); have more contact, support and positive relationships with one another (Branje et al., 2004; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009; Leathers, 2005; Leichtentritt, 2013; Stocker, 1994); feel closer to their caregivers (Davidson-Arad & Klein, 2011; Drapeau et al., 2000); suffer less emotional and behavioral problems (Aldridge & Cautley, 1976; Boer & Spiering, 1991; Hegar, 1986; Leathers, 2005; Linares et al., 2007; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Smith, 1998; Tarren-Sweeney & Hazell, 2005; Webster, Shlonsky, Shaw, & Brookhart, 2005); and have an increased likelihood of reunification with their parents (Albert & King, 2008; Davidson-Arad & Klein, 2011; Drapeau et al., 2000). Even with these positive implications, siblings having joint placements are dependent on, the size of the sibling group (Connell et al., 2006; CWIG, 2013; Drapeau et al., 2000; Hegar, 1986; 1988; Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Kaufman, Walton, & Thomas, 1981; Kim, 2001; Smith, 1996; 1998; Thorpe & Swart, 1992); whether siblings entered care at the same time (Aldridge & Cautley, 1976; Cutler, 1984; Hegar, 1986; Staff &

Fein, 1992; Thorpe & Swart, 1992); and whether or not they were placed in foster care with relatives (Shlonsky et al., 2003; Webster et al., 2005).

Separate sibling placements. Early social work assumptions embodied the desire to place brothers and sisters together whenever possible. It has not been until much later that research and practice has begun to identify special circumstances that may indicate that siblings need to be placed separately (Adler, 1970; Albert & King, 2008; Boer & Spiering, 1991; CWIG, 2013; Drapeau et al., 2000; Church, 2013; Hegar, 1986; 1988; 2005; Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Kosonen, 1996; Leathers, 2005; Rees & Pithouse, 2014; Revans, 2007; Rothschild & Pollack, 2013; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Smith, 1996; 1998; Thorpe & Swart, 1992; Ward, 1984; Whelan, 2003; Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005). With this growing body of research there is also new consideration and closer examination of the possibility of separation.

Researchers have begun to recognize that the assumption of child welfare agencies and social workers to jointly place siblings entering foster care does not always meet the needs of the children, are not always in their best interests, and are not always considered best practices. What is required are foster care placement decisions which are balanced and "guided by agency policy, resource availability, and casework judgment" (Cutler, 1984, p. 88). There are times that separate placements for siblings are necessary and can include, the diverse needs siblings (Albert & King, 2008; Boer & Springer, 1991; Drapeau et al., 2000; Hegar, 1988; Leathers, 2005; Rothschild & Pollack, 2013; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Ward, 1984); problematic and negative sibling relationships (Church, 2013; Leathers, 2005; Leichtentritt, 2013; Linares et al., 2007; Rothschild & Pollack, 2013; Smith, 1996; Whelan, 2003); the prevention of problematic roles and relationships which have been developed

because of their role in the family (e.g. parentified child) (Aldridge & Cautley, 1976; Davidson-Arad & Klein, 2011; Jones & Niblett, 1985; Kosonen, 1996; Leichtentritt, 2013; Linares et al., 2007; Smith 1996; 1998; Tarren-Sweeney & Hazell, 2005; Ward, 1984); difficulty in finding foster parents willing to take in and care for siblings (Albert & King, 2008; Kosonen, 1996; Leathers, 2005; Revans, 2007); and the size and age of sibling group (CWIG, 2013; Connell et al., 2006; Drapeau et al., 2000; Hegar, 1988; 2005; Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Kaufman et al., 1981; Kosonen, 1996; Kim, 2001; Leathers, 2005; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Smith, 1996; 1998; Thorpe & Swart, 1992; Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005). The identification of these factors gives perspective to the needs of siblings as well as the possibility of future harm by placing them with their siblings.

Research has been conducted on the consideration of sibling separation and its positive implications (Boer & Spiering, 1991; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2011; Kim, 2001; Kosonen, 1996; Leathers, 2005; Linares et al., 2007; Tarren-Sweeney & Hazell, 2005; Testa & Rolock, 1999; Timberlake & Hamlin, 1982; Ullman-Gheri & Weiss, 2013; Waid, 2014). What has been found is that separating siblings in foster care does not impact their relationships with their siblings (Davidson-Arad & Klein, 2011); the quality of these relationships continued to be stable regardless of whether siblings were placed together (Linares et al., 2007); and that there is only minimal support to the argument that foster children should be placed with their siblings whenever possible (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2011). Although these considerations and positive implications have been brought forth, this does not equate to child welfare agencies drastically changing their policies and procedures. Rather, careful consideration needs to occur in determining what is best for siblings entering foster care.

Thematic Cohesiveness

This thesis is presented in a manuscript format and contains four chapters. Chapter one introduces the research, situates me in the context of the research, demonstrates the purpose and significance for this subject area, and provides an in-depth literature review. The goal of this chapter is to provide a thorough assessment of previous research and to offer cohesiveness for the remainder of the thesis.

Chapters two and three focus on the research from the perspectives of foster parents and social workers respectively. Chapter two begins with a discussion of foster parents in the context of the child welfare system as well as siblings in foster home placements. Details regarding the mixed methodology utilized, as well as the selection of respondents, and limitations of the approach are discussed. Results of the study are presented in relation to both quantitative results and qualitative findings, specific to the views and opinions of foster parents in relation to the context and possibility of separating siblings in foster care. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion specific to the findings and their implications to research pertaining to context of sibling placements.

Chapter three begins with a discussion of social workers in the context of the child welfare system and provides an anti-oppressive framework to working with and making decisions around sibling placement in foster care. Details regarding the mixed methodology utilized, as well as the selection of respondents, and limitations of the approach are discussed. Results of the study are presented in relation to both quantitative results and qualitative findings, specific to the views and opinions of social workers in relation to the context and possibility of separating siblings in foster care. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion pertaining to the findings and implications for social work practice.

To conclude the thesis, chapter four is comprised of an overall discussion of the findings contained in chapters two and three, providing arguments from both foster parents and social workers who support the separation of siblings in foster care, in certain situations. Discussions provide an overview of the limitations of the study as well as its contributions to current literature. Finally, a conclusion, and summary of the research and its usefulness to child welfare agencies is provided, as well as implications for research, front-line practice and social action.

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Co Authorship Statement

In the following two manuscripts, Kelly A. Sheppard is listed as first author and Dr. Delores V. Mullings is listed as second author. The following is a breakdown of each author's contributions:

Title: Navigating Sibling Placement in the Child Welfare System.

Kelly A. Sheppard: 70% - conceived, designed, coordinated and conducted the study; collected and analyzed data; theoretically framed the argument; drafted and revised the manuscript.

Dr. Delores V. Mullings: 30% - contributed to the design of the study; supervised data collection and analysis; contributed to the framing of arguments; revised the manuscript.

Title: Sibling Placement from an Anti-Oppressive Perspective: Can it be Achieved?

Kelly A. Sheppard: 70% - conceived, designed, coordinated and conducted the study; collected and analyzed data; theoretically framed the argument; drafted and revised the manuscript.

Dr. Delores V. Mullings: 30% - contributed to the design of the study; supervised data collection and analysis; contributed to the framing of arguments; revised the manuscript.

CHAPTER 2

Navigating Sibling Placement in the Child Welfare System

Title: Navigating Sibling Placement in the Child Welfare System

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Abstract

Foster parents play important roles in the lives of children, who are unable to safely remain with their families and child welfare agencies rely heavily on them to provide care and stability for children. There is limited research that focuses on siblings, their time in foster care, or their placement considerations; however, the research that has been conducted and well as social work practice, favor joint sibling placement. This paper presents findings that explore foster parents' perspective about sibling separation.

Key Words: Foster parents, sibling placement, child welfare, foster children

There are approximately 35,000 foster homes in Canada (Canadian Foster Family

Association, 2015) and 70,640 children between the ages of zero and 19 years, in foster care

(Statistics Canada, 2015). Foster parents are the largest group of Canadian child welfare

service providers and as such are an integral part of the child welfare system (Anderson,

2013; Barbell & Freundlich, 2001; Brown, 2010; Leschied, Rodger, Brown, den Dunnen, &

Pickel, 2014). The main objective of foster caring is to provide care for children until they

can safely return to their families or live independently. Therefore, foster parents are

responsible for helping children transition from appropriate or temporary caring situations

into a more permanent plan, which may include transition to other foster homes, relatives,

or adoptive homes (Anderson, 2013; Department of Children, Seniors and Social

Development [CSSD], 2011; Fowler, 2008; Sripathy, 2004).

Children entering and/or living in foster care have complex issues, which may

include vicarious trauma (e.g. family violence) and experiences with maltreatment such as

emotional, psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, developmental delays, and learning

disabilities (Kozlowska & Hanney, 2001; Rork & McNeil, 2011; Swick, 2007; Whiting &

Huber, 2007; Wilfong, 2014). In spite foster children's complex needs, most foster parents

do not receive appropriate education and training to prepare them to work with the

complex needs inherent in traumatized children. Foster parents in Newfoundland and

Labrador (NL) are mandated to complete the institutional sanctioned Parenting Resources

Information Development Education (PRIDE) training, which is used as a part of the

preparation, assessment, and selection of prospective foster parents (CSSD, 2011; Farris-

Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Fowler, 2008). Although the training provides some scenario-

based information about situations and circumstances that foster parents may experience

while caring for foster children, it is not culturally sensitive and does not include training to

help foster parents understand and care effectively for children living with complex issues (Anderson, 2013; Barbell & Freundlich, 2001; Fowler, 2008; Leschied et al., 2014; Mullings, 2007).

Most literature and training is geared toward educating foster parents on child development (Anderson, 2013; Fowler, 2008) and legislative policies. This conventional approach lacks concurrent support strategies for foster parents; therefore, there are ill-equipped to address culturally and child-specific needs. In addition, foster parents are tasked with helping the children in their care to feel welcome and settled in their new environment; attend to their needs (e.g. anxiety, loss, grief) while adhering to institutional policies and procedures. Anderson (2013) states that foster parents are "inundated with tasks while the child is in the midst of crisis" (p. 135) – being separated from family, school, community, and being placed with strangers. If foster parents are not adequately trained to care for foster children, how do they know how to care for children's complex and cultural needs?

The question as to whether to place siblings together or separately remains conflicting, inconsistent, controversial, and limited in both research and practice (Bank & Kahn, 1997; Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2010; Hegar, 1988; Kim, 2001; Rast & Rast, 2014; Ryan, 2002; Shlonsky, Webster & Needell, 2003; Smith, 1998). When siblings are separated in foster care, the decisions are often based on administrative reasons or lack of foster homes willing to take siblings, rather than the children's needs (Anderson, 2013; Brown & Bednar, 2006; James, Monn, Palinkas & Leslie, 2008; Kosonen, 1996; Revans, 2007; Smith, 1996). Considering foster parents spend much of their time providing care to foster children, an important question to ask is, what do foster parents think about foster siblings' placements?

The purpose of this research is to explore fostering parents' perception of sibling separation in foster care. The research employed a mixed method approach of both quantitative and qualitative data gathering. The primary goals of the research are to (1) document the perceptions of foster parents in NL regarding separating siblings in foster care; (2) share the findings with stakeholders including child welfare agencies, foster parents and schools of social works in Canada; and (3) offer recommendations to stakeholders and child welfare agencies on ways to assess, decide and support sibling separation in foster care. A brief discussion around foster parents caring for opposite foster children will conclude the paper.

Siblings and Foster Home Placement

Children enter foster care for a variety of reasons; however, the primary purpose is to ensure their safety, well-being, and protection from maltreatment and trauma (Anderson, 2013; Hutchison & Charlesworth, 2000). Despite having to be removed from their families for abuse and neglect, being placed in foster care can mean initial and ongoing distress, uncertainty and instability. The experiences of foster children and the impact of being removed from their families are well documented in the social work literature of Albert and King (2008), Barber and Delfabbro (2003), Gustavsson and MacEachron (2010), Leathers (2005), and McCormick (2010); however, the literature does not place emphasis or focus on sibling groups.

Research and practice approaches regarding sibling separation in foster care is lacking (Boer & Spiering, 1991; Church, 2012; Hegar, 1988; Kim, 2001; Pfouts, 1976; Rees & Pithouse, 2014; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Staff & Fein, 1992; Stocker, 1994); in addition a definition of "sibling" and the challenges that they experience are missing in the literature

and this is important given that the majority of children in care are in sibling groups (Albert & King, 2008; Kernan, 2005; Staff & Fein, 1992; Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005). Scholars cite siblings' age, needs, and family conflicts as well as foster home availability among the top reasons for separating siblings in foster care (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003; Cross, Koh, Rolock & Eblen-Manning, 2013; Child Welfare Information Gateway [CWIG], 2013; Drapeau, Simard, Beaudry & Charbonneau, 2000; Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Hegar, 1986; 1988; James et al., 2008; Kaufman, Walton, & Thomas, 1981; Rothschild & Pollack, 2013; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Smith, 1996; 1998; Tarren-Sweeney & Hazell, 2005; Thorpe & Swart, 1992; Whelan, 2003; Waid, 2014; Ward, 1984).

Recent trends in Canada suggest that there is an increase in the number of children being removed from their homes and placed in foster care (CSSD, 2014a; 2014b; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Fowler, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2015). With this increase, it is understandable that there is a greater demand for foster care placements. It is well documented that Aboriginal and black children are significantly overrepresented in foster care when compared to their population (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001; Corneau & Stergiopoulos, 2012; de Montigny, 2013; Pon, 2009; Sinclair, 2004); while NL does not collect race-based statistics on children in care, this information is important to mention. Regardless of the number, ethnicity, socio-economic status, race, or gender of children entering foster care, foster parents must receive the appropriate training to help them work with children in their care that are separated from their siblings. However, most research investigates foster parents' motivation for fostering and excludes their perceptions about placement options. This research therefore, is unique in that regard.

Foster Parent Perceptions of Foster Siblings

Foster parents have a profound impact on children's lives, but there is no suggestion here that all foster parents are benevolent and altruistic; however, a full discussion of this aspect of foster parenting is beyond the scope of this paper. Foster parents provide care, support, and nurturing to children who enter foster care; they also advocate on foster children's behalf; keep children connected to family, community and culture; and attend to all their physical, emotional, behavioral, and educational needs (Anderson, 2013; Barbell & Freundlich, 2001; Brown & Calder, 1999; 2000; Sripathy, 2004; Testa & Rolock, 1999). Per Swick (2007), Whiting and Huber (2007), and Wilfong (2014), many children in foster care, experience feelings of confusion, fear, apprehension of the unknown, loss, sadness, anxiety, and stress. Therefore, caring foster parents are needed to support their transition. In spite their expected altruistic parenting roles, foster parents often feel devalued, silenced and excluded when decisions are being made for the children's care (Brown & Calder, 2000; Fowler, 2008; Mullings, 2010).

The literature suggests that foster parents are selfless in their motivation to care for foster children individually or in sibling groups (Anderson, 2013; Leschied et al., 2014; Whiting & Huber, 2007). Therefore, it is not unusual for foster parents to care for siblings under extreme duress providing space is available in their homes (Albert & King, 2008; Brown & Bednar, 2006; Brown & Calder, 1999; 2000; Cross et al., 2013; Linares, Li, Shrout, Brody, & Pettit, 2007; McCormick, 2010; Miron, Sujan, & Middleton, 2013; Smith, 1996; 1998; Staff & Fein, 1992; Wilfong, 2014). Foster parents experience challenges in caring for foster siblings, including lack of: social worker, agency, formal, and inform supports; information about their roles and responsibilities as foster parents in respect to agency

policy; information about the foster siblings; relevant training to address the needs of foster children; and cultural understanding (Brown & Calder, 1999; 2000; Brown, St. Arnault, Sintzel, & George, 2011; Fowler, 2008; Leschied et al., 2014). Research suggest that siblings add positively to the caregiving environment, provide familiarity, love, and comfort to one another and contribute to building strong bonds and relationships (Ullmann-Gheri & Weiss, 2013; Ward, 1984). Foster parents are therefore, reluctant to separate siblings and therefore, agree to do so under dire circumstances such as severe abuse.

Locating the Researcher

As a social worker working in the foster care and adoptions areas of child welfare, I am implicated in this research. The desire to further develop my understanding and knowledge about siblings in foster care motivated my interest to undertake this research. Through my professional experience, I have gained an appreciation for not only my role as a social worker, but also that of a confidante, a sounding board, and a listening ear to the families and children I work with. Working in this field has become much more than employment, as over the years this experience has provided me with significant knowledge and enhanced skills in working not only with children and their families, but also with siblings and the foster parents who care for them and provide a safe and secure home environment. My experience as a child welfare social worker and my sense of connection with the study respondents led to some internal conflicts over reporting the results in a way that would allow foster parent's experiences, pertaining to siblings in foster care, to be appropriately disseminated yet not interpreted as disloyal. By keeping these concerns at the forefront, I attempted to separate them from the data analysis and mitigate their effects.

Methodology

This research was guided by the following questions: (1) What are the experiences of foster parents caring for siblings in NL? (2) Under what condition would separating siblings support the development of each child in the sibling group? (3) What do foster parents think about the idea of separating siblings who are in foster care? The research was conducted using a mixed method approach to data collection, which was achieved using an anonymous online survey tool. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a single survey allowed for the integration of these tools to answer questions of importance (Grinnell, Gabor & Unrau, 2012; Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002); provided the opportunity to gather data from different of perspectives due to the complexity of research (Sale et al., 2002); and helped to expand the research in a way that a single approach could not. The utilization of the online survey was based on its use in a diverse population group as well as its wide application (Bisman & Hardcastle, 1999).

Criteria for participants included foster parents who have experience caring for siblings in foster care. The key informant, The Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association (NLFFA) posted a call for participants via their foster parent email distribution list which provided information about the researchers, purpose of the research, and a recruitment flyer which included a link to the online survey tool (Appendix A and C). Prior to completing the survey, detailed information about the research, benefits and risks, and a consent form were provided to participants (Appendix D and E).

The research was designed with an anonymous online survey tool consisting of 17 quantitative questions ranging from those collecting basic demographic information to more specific open-ended qualitative questions that sought to collect the experiences, thoughts, and perceptions of foster parents in relation to the possibility and context of

separating siblings in foster care (Appendix F). The aim was to collect data from 15-20

respondents who have cared for or are caring for siblings in foster care in the NL.

Written responses from foster parents were analyzed by grouping the data into

themes and identifying similarities and links by constant comparison (Boeije, 2000; Glaser,

1965). This process provided the opportunity to identify themes and sub-themes

pertaining to foster parent's thoughts and opinions on sibling placement in foster care. Peer

validity was use during the writing process to ensure accuracy in idea and context

interpretation and collection of valid data, as well as providing systemic discussion

throughout the process to assist in minimizing biases (Bisman & Hardcastle, 1999; Roberts

& Greene, 2002) which provided an opportunity for improved creditability as a researcher

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research does not typically generalize to a larger

population; therefore, a large sample size for this study was less important than collecting

rich and thick detailed data. The 20 respondents who participated in this study was large

enough to provide themes across the data along with different experiences that brought

complexity to the analysis.

Methodological and conceptual limitations are noted in this study and include:

recruitment of participants; lack of supporting research; sample size, relevance, and

generalization; and definitions. Due to the use of email distribution and the online survey

tool, the use of technology had the potential to limit the respondents and reduce diversity

within the sample, to those who have Internet and who have provided contact information

to the NLFFA. With the limited and inconsistent research found regarding siblings and

sibling placement, the inability to find a range of studies which reflect the concerns noted by

the foster parents was even further restricted. The research results may not be

representative of the opinions or experiences of the larger population of foster parents in

NL given the small sample size. The research only sought to explore the views of foster

parents involved in the child welfare system and did not consider the views of the children

affected. In addition, much of the previous research was conducted in the United States of

America. Although there may be some relevance for Canada, child welfare policies,

standards, principles, guidelines, and legislation is much different. Therefore, the research

findings cannot be uncritically applied to the rest of NL or Canada. Finally, an inclusive and

child-centered definition of siblings was not provided to the participants. In addition, the

qualitative research efforts also did not specify who a 'brother' or 'sister' was, which

presumably allowed participants to make this determination.

Findings

Participant Demographics

The sample size consisted of 20 respondents with 80% of those being female; all

except for 5 identifying as Caucasian/White, and ranged in age from 18 to 60 years or older,

with the majority (70%) being between the ages of 40 and 60 years or older. Of the sample,

17 foster parents (85%) identified as being married; 55% reside in a small rural population

center described as having 1,000 to 29,999 residents. As expected, most respondents

(90%) have a high school degree, equivalent or higher; and 55% were unemployed or

retired (Figure 2-1). Although not well documented, Sripathy (2004) provides similar

demographic information related to the profile of foster parents, noting many who provide

care to children are female, married, educated, and older in age (e.g. approximately 50 years

or older). Of the respondents, 55% have fostered between 1 and 5 years, while 40% have

between 5 years and 10 or more years' experience (Figure 2-2). Sixty percent of the
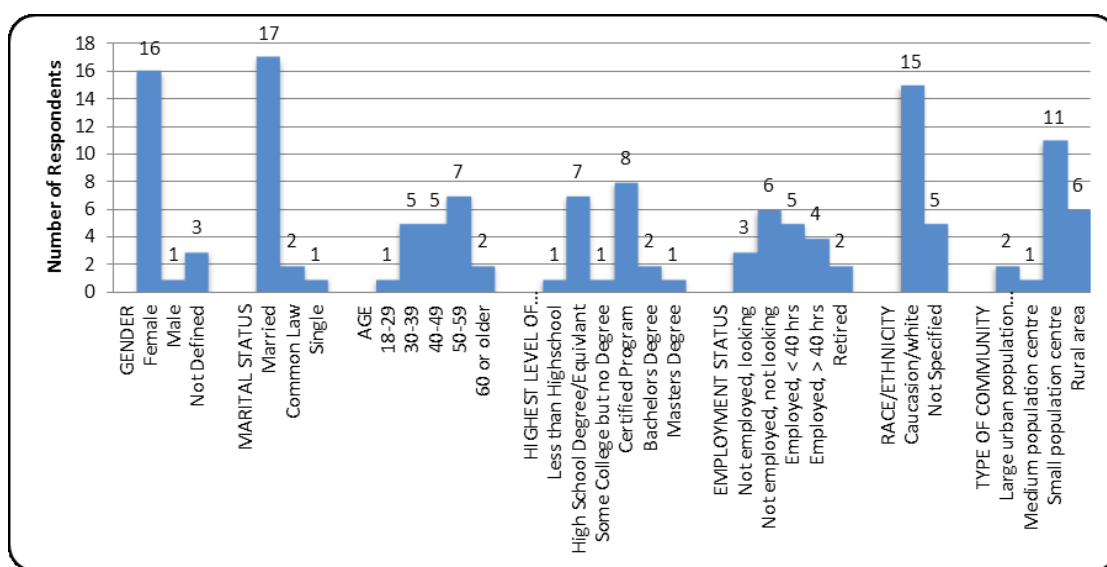
Figure 2-1: Demographic information of foster parent respondents

respondents identified as having less than 1 to 3 years' experience providing care to foster

siblings (Figure 2-3). In addition to the demographic information, foster parents were

asked to choose a statement which best described their thoughts on foster sibling

placements. Of the respondents, 60% felt siblings should always be placed together when

entering foster care, and 40% felt that siblings should sometimes be placed together. None

of the foster parents felt that siblings should never be placed together (Figure 2-4). These

findings coincide with the literature pertaining to siblings entering foster care.
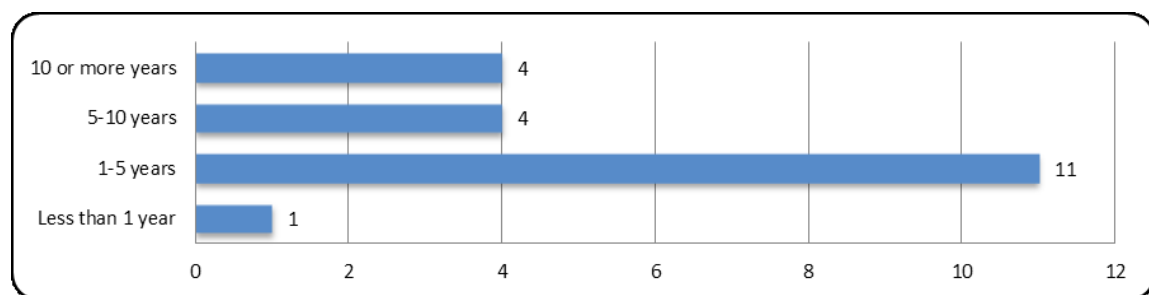
Figure 2-2: Length of time fostering
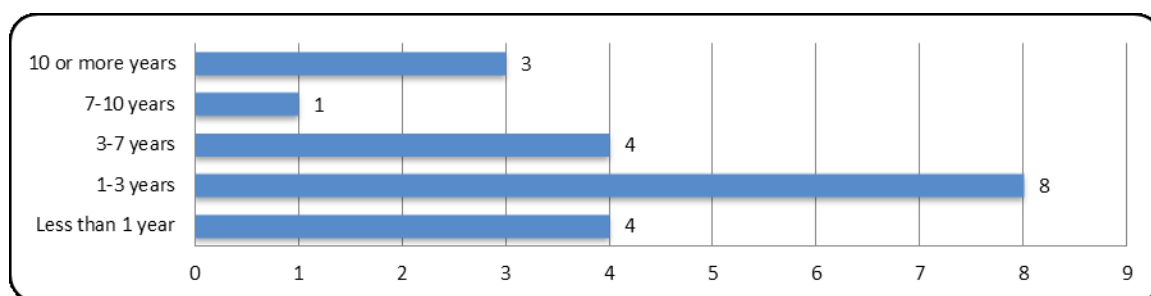
Figure 2-3: Length of time fostering siblings

Previous research addresses the notion of supporting joint sibling placements (Aldridge & Cautley, 1976; Church, 2013; Depp, 1983; Hegar, 1986; 1988;
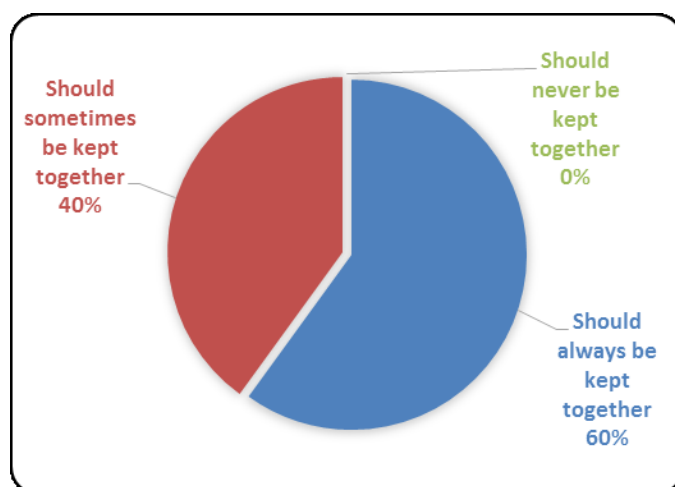
Figure 2-4: Keeping siblings together in the same foster home

Leichtentritt,2013; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Smith, 1996; 1998; Staff & Fein, 1992; Stocker, 1994; Tarren-Sweeney & Hazell, 2005; Thorpe & Swart, 1992; Washington, 2007; Webster, Shlonsky, Shaw & Brookhart, 2005; Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005); however, also offers exceptions to this

consideration when other factors influencing the placement of sibling together (e.g. needs of individual children, abuse amongst sibling, behaviors) are at play (Adler, 1970; Boer & Spiering, 1991; Jones & Niblett, 1985; Kaufman et al., 1981; Rothschild & Pollack,2013).

Qualitative Findings

The following section provides the findings and analysis from the qualitative, open-ended questions as well as discussion. All respondents stated that siblings should always or

sometimes be placed together and qualified these with specific narratives. Using constant comparison (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005; Padgett, 2008); responses from each question were reviewed for similarities, and ideas or rationale of similar nature were grouped together in categories. Identified categories were later collapsed into sub-categories. These sub-categories were reviewed for themes which were grouped together.

Themes

The final questions included in the survey were qualitative and sought open-ended responses. Foster parents were asked to choose a statement which best described their thoughts on sibling placement in foster care and to further explain their choice (Table 2-1). The following constitutes the combined responses grouped into themes.

Which statement best describes your thoughts on keeping siblings together, in the same home, while in foster care?

- Should always be kept together
- Should sometimes be kept together
- Should never be kept together

Please describe your answer to the above question.

Table 2-1: Foster parent open ended questions about sibling placement

Siblings should always be kept together. Themes were identified by foster parents as rationale for placing siblings jointly as follows: (a) sibling bonds and relationships; (b) family connections and identity; and (c) providing support, protection, and security.

Sibling bonds and relationships. The recognition of the importance of sibling bonds and relationships is an overwhelming theme expressed by foster parents.

Respondents felt strongly that the quality of relationships between siblings is extremely

important and need to be maintained. This sense of bonding and attachment has been

echoed throughout literature pertaining to foster care and the placement consideration of

siblings, particularly in support of joint placements (Bonacci, 2012; CWIG, 2013; Herrick &

Piccus, 2005; Kernan, 2005; Miron et al., 2013; Rees & Pithouse, 2014).

One foster parent noted the normality of having siblings reside together in foster

care as well as the reduction in stress related to not knowing where other siblings are

placed:

> It keeps their lives as normal as possible under such stressful situations. Keeping
> siblings together is a win-win for everyone. The children have enough stress in
> their lives at least if they are together they have each other to lean on and they don't
> have to worry about where their siblings are and how they are doing. I am 100% for
> keeping siblings together. I think that is the least we can do to help our most
> vulnerable.

Another foster parent echoed the importance of siblings having each other to rely on by

suggesting:

> These kids are taken from their home and put with strangers. Most adults would be
> uncomfortable if that happened to them let alone a child. At least if they have a
> sibling they know someone in the home. They're pulled from their home and put
> with strangers. If they have a sibling with them at least they have someone they
> know.

In supporting the need for siblings to be placed together, one foster parent

recognized the protection mechanism inherent in sibling relationships by sharing:

> Their bond is extreme. They stand up for each other; I feel this is a protection
> mechanism. There is a bond that should not be broken. I feel there will always be a
> loss if they are separated. No one comes between them.

The importance of ensuring sibling relationships in foster care is summed up by one foster parent, "I feel that children will have a better sense of security when placed with a sibling. It's a bond that a child needs when their future is unknown".

Family connection and identity. Foster parents felt strongly that siblings ought to be kept together to preserve family ties and the family identity. To support their points of view, some foster parents also shared their own perspectives and experiences as foster children themselves.

> As a person who grew up in foster care, I strongly believe that keeping siblings together is very important. As a child being removed from the only familiar surroundings I knew, having my sister with me was what made the transition from home to home easier. I cannot imagine the devastation had we been separated. The attachments formed with your siblings helps in forming attachments to others. Having that taken away from you would only make you feel a greater sense of abandonment.

Another foster parent comments:

> It is my very strong opinion that when siblings come out of their home, everything should be done to keep them together. Separating siblings can be a lifelong loss for those children. They have already "lost" mom and dad now they are losing each other. Siblings "need" to be together no matter what.

Like the literature, foster parents agree that family connections and ties are lifelong and enduring and acknowledge the importance of sibling relationships and children's loss when they are removed from their families and communities (Bonacci, 2012; Groza, Maschmeier, Jamison & Piccola, 2003; McCormick, 2010; Sheehan, Darlington, Noller & Feeney, 2004).

Support, protection, and security. Linked to the previous themes of sibling bonds, relationships, and family connections, it is recognized that siblings provide a source of

support and protection; create stability, emotional connectedness and security; as well as

create a sense of closeness for each other in the family (Albert & King, 2008; Aldridge &

Cautley, 1976; Bank & Kahn, 1997). The decision to remove children from their parents not

only causes turmoil for the children and creates disruption in the family's structure and

functioning, but produces significant trauma, which is enhanced if the removal also results

in separation from siblings (James, 2004; James et al., 2008; Sripathy, 2004; Swick, 2007;

Timberlake & Hamlin, 1982). The joint placement of siblings can help to reduce this

disruption and one foster parent noted the positive impact of such a placement:

> I believe that when siblings are placed together they are definitely able to adjust to the dramatic change more positively. They have each other to lean on and do not have to worry about their siblings.

> The strength of these relationships provides the space for siblings to seek support

from each other during stressful, joyous, and happy times (CWIG, 2013; Kosonen, 1996).

One foster parent identified the strength, feeling of support, and closeness of siblings in

foster care by acknowledging their sense of family:

> Siblings love the feeling that they are still a family, and I find they stick together and they protect each other outside the family home. Siblings love the feeling that they are still family and I found they are very protective of each other.

There is strong advocacy in maintaining sibling relationships while in foster care as one

foster parent acknowledges that it is "important to maintain close sibling relationships and

to be there to support one another". This is congruent with previous research (Ullmann-

Gheri & Weiss, 2013; Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005); however, ideas of how these

relationships can and should be maintained remains questionable (Church, 2013; CWIG,

2013).

Siblings should sometimes be kept together. While none of the foster parents identified the need for siblings to always be separated when entering or while in foster care, they did provide circumstances whereby such placement options should be supported. The following themes emerged from respondents' response to qualify there meaning: (a) safety, abuse and maltreatment and (b) individual needs and characteristics were resounding reasons foster parents felt the separation of siblings could be necessary and taken into consideration.

Safety, abuse, and maltreatment. Although foster parents felt strongly that siblings should be kept together, they acknowledged that there are times and situations when this may not be possible. One such view, shared by a foster parent, encapsulates several potential reasons for sibling separation:

> While ideally, we want families to stay together, there are a number of reasons children should be separated. Health, safety, and space in a home along with conflicts with children already in the home.

Similarly, foster parents shared their view on the safety of siblings by stating, "sometimes safety for other siblings is a reason, sometimes a sibling is abusive mentally or physically toward his/her younger siblings". Another foster parent also felt that abuse between siblings could constitute the potential for siblings to be placed separately:

> I believe when there is abuse of any kind between siblings, there should be some separation to give the children a chance to begin the healing process while having a safe place away from the abuse.

The theme of sibling safety is often cited as one of the main reasons that sibling separation is considered during foster care placement (Rothschild & Pollack, 2013; Waid, 2014).

Individual needs and characteristics. Children who are removed from their

parents have history of maltreatment, abuse, and trauma. The needs of these children are

quite different from those who have never experienced such a disruption in their lives and

this creates an atmosphere of complex individual needs requiring attention (Adler, 1976;

Kozlowska & Hanney, 2001; Rork & McNeil, 2011; Wilfong, 2014). Foster parents support

separating siblings when their individual needs outweigh joint placement by stating: "there

are some situations where some siblings have special need and need more one on one care".

Other foster parents have similar views noting that the best interest of siblings also need to

considered:

> It is not always in the best interest of both children. Both need to be treated as
> individuals and should get the supports they need. Not always do each sibling
> require the same care.

> Outside the realm of individual needs, foster parents shared their views on the

negative influences that siblings may have on one another. One foster parent shared, "there

are other situations where siblings negatively influence each other for different reasons, ex.

behavior issues, mental health issues, etc.". However, even with these potential reasons for

separation, foster parents feel that "all sibling should still have regular visits" if they do not

reside in the same foster home. One foster parent shared:

> If one has more emotional problems, then the other they should go to homes that
> can deal with it better. But should still be able to see each other on a regular basis.
> When the one with the emotion problem gets help then put them together if
> possible.

These views coincide with the results that all foster parents feel siblings ought to be kept

together while in foster care; however, note that there are situations and circumstances

which may impact the same from happening. Literature specific to sibling placement in

foster care shares a very similar view, in that overwhelmingly there is support in favor of joint sibling placements, with the recognition that there are exceptions which warrant separate placements (Albert & King, 2008; Church, 2013; Leichtentritt, 2013; Linares et al., 2007; Rees & Pithouse, 2014; Tarren-Sweeney & Hazell, 2005; Whelan, 2003).

Siblings should never be kept together. None of the foster parents identified the need for siblings to never be kept together when entering or while in foster care. This rationale is supported in literature pertaining to sibling placement as the consensus throughout research has spoken more positively toward joint sibling placements as opposed to separate placements (Depp, 1983; Drapeau et al., 2000; Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Kosonen, 1996; Leathers, 2005; Leichtentritt, 2013; Linares et al., 2007; Rothschild & Pollack, 2013; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Washington, 2007; Webster et al., 2005).

Discussions

Parallel to the literature and social work practice, foster parents support joint sibling placement and are willing to extend themselves to achieve joint care for siblings provided they have the space to accommodate members of the sibling group (Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2010; Rast & Rast, 2002; Ryan, 2002; Shlonsky et al., 2003). Many foster parents suggest that placing siblings together in the same foster home is best for children to maintaining their identity; provide support to one another; reduce disruption; turmoil, and trauma and help to strengthen bonds and relationships (Boer & Spiering, 1991; Cross et al., 2013; Kosonen, 1996; Leathers, 2005; Leichtentritt, 2013; Miron et al., 2013; Smith, 1996; 1998; Staff & Fein, 1992). In spite having only minimal training about child development and emotional needs, foster parents recognize the grief and loss that siblings experience

when they are separated from their families and they strive to help the children remain

connected (Groza et al., 2003; Kernan, 2005; McCormick, 2010).

Neither PRIDE nor other foster parents' training address separate sibling placement

but foster parent use their experience as caregivers to suggest that in extreme

circumstances such as abuse, siblings ought to be placed in separate foster homes.

However, foster parents noted that their perspectives are not sought in the larger scheme of

caring for children; therefore, their beliefs about separate foster care placement for siblings

is not likely considered especially since joint placement is the first choice for social workers.

Their roles as primary caregivers are relevant and limited to advocacy, love and care for

children. Foster parents will continue to face challenges while caring for children with

complex needs which is exacerbated by their lack of training and exclusion from decision-

making.

Foster parents identified several aspects of supporting children in foster care;

however, they did not acknowledge cultural needs, socio-economic status or other relevant

identities outside of the sibling and familiar relationships. Studies suggest that Aboriginal

and Black children are significantly overrepresented in foster care when compared to their

population (Corneau & Stergiopoulos, 2012; Pon, 2009; Sinclair, 2004). Given the limited

number of Aboriginal and Black foster families in NL, these children are likely to be placed

with White families. In addition, foster care placement among Aboriginal children were

significant in NL. Many children placed in Labrador-Grenfell were Aboriginal; of this

number 15% spoke Innu as a first language and 17% of all Aboriginal children were placed

in homes with cultures that are different from theirs (Fowler, 2008, viii). Fowler (2008)

recommends that policy and program development be culturally sensitive to respond to the

unique needs of Aboriginal children and their families; this is especially important since

"many practices and procedures of the in-care systems that are either insensitive to Aboriginal culture or completely irrelevant" (p. 84). In Toronto, the Black population amounts to 8.5%, yet 40.8% of foster children are Black (One Vision One Voice, 2016). Although data is unavailable for Black foster children in NL, it is worth noting these conditions since foster placement trends are similar across Canada. Foster parents need appropriate education and training to help them relate appropriately with siblings who are outside of their race and culture to provide the best support to them. Love and care are important as are cultural understanding to help siblings adjust to culturally different parenting styles and environment.

Conclusion

This research explored foster parents' perspective regarding the possibility of separating siblings, who enter the foster care system. This research has responded to the gap in the literature by building on the small body of research that is beginning to explore the possibility of separate foster care placements for siblings and under what circumstances this may be required. The findings add creditability to the context and possibility of sibling separation in foster care despite the limited research on the topic; however, further research is needed with larger sample populations to determine the extent to which foster parents support this notion as well as their training needs in understanding the complexities of siblings and sibling needs; as well as empirical evidence that can provide a solid working base of knowledge for meeting the needs of siblings in foster care.

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CHAPTER 3

Sibling Placement from an Anti-Oppressive Perspective: Can it be Achieved?

Title: Sibling Placement from an Anti-Oppressive Perspective: Can it be Achieved?

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Abstract

Social workers play an important role in the lives of children and families who are involved with the child welfare system. They are tasked with upholding the mandate and standards of the agency; understanding the complexity of issues facing children and their families; determining the safety and well-being of children in conjunction with the needs of the family; and making difficult decisions to ensure children are protected from maltreatment. Social workers strive for family preservation; however, when this is not possible, the decision to remove children from their families becomes one of last resort. These difficult decisions are often compounded by the needs of the children, the foster home placement, and if the children are siblings. There is limited research that focuses on siblings, their time in foster care, or their placement considerations; however, social work practice and research that has been conducted favors joint sibling placements. This paper presents a perspective - the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of social workers who have, or are currently working with siblings who are in foster care, within the context of sibling separation. An analysis of child welfare agencies will question if anti-oppressive practice (AOP) can be applied to such work.

Key Words: Social workers, sibling separation, child welfare, foster care, anti-oppressive practice

In Canada, child welfare is a significant practice area in the social work profession. In their

role, social workers have a mandate to protect the best interest of the child. Pursuing this

mandate necessitates social workers working with children and their families as well as

community members. The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), states "the

social worker's task is to understand a variety of factors related to the child, the family, and

the community and to balance the child's safety and well-being with the rights and needs of

a family that may be in need of help" (2005). In Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), the

Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development (CSSD) is responsible for carrying

out child welfare practice by, "protecting children and youth from maltreatment by parents,

and supporting their healthy development and well-being through the provision of

programs and services" (Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development [CSSD],

2014a, p. 6). This premise is the guiding principle for social workers acting in the best

interests of the child.

     Child welfare policies and practices have increasingly come under scrutiny and

critique for the way in which colonization, anti-black racism, and various forms of

discrimination are embedded in social work practice; see for example Anglin (2002),

Blackstock (2009); Collings (2008), Fowler (2008), Herbert (2007), and Pon (2009). Social

workers are engaged in a providing services such as family support, child protection,

advocacy, adoptions and foster, the focus of this research. The principles and values of

social work is aligned with the policies that guide child welfare agencies; however, social

workers often struggle with workplace demands (e.g. high caseload numbers and agency

directives) and their own allegiance to the profession's ethics (Bednar, 2003; CASW, 2005;

Hutchison & Charlesworth, 2000; Jones, 2001; Smith & Donovan, 2003; Thoma, 2013; Zell,

2006). The complexities of children's' lives and their needs place great responsibilities on

social workers which require them to make spontaneous and challenging decisions

(Collings, 2008) about how best to serve and support children including foster placement.

Placing siblings together in the same foster home has historically been social

workers' preferred option for foster care placement. Overwhelmingly, social workers

strongly support keeping siblings together to allows family and sibling relationships to be

maintained (Boer & Spiering, 1991; Church, 2013; Rothschild & Pollack, 2013) and alleviate

children's feelings of abandonment, loss, and helplessness (Hegar, 1988; James, Monn,

Palinkas & Leslie, 2008; Timberlake & Hamlin, 1982; Washington, 2007). In addition,

sibling relationships can provide a significant source of continuity throughout a child's

lifetime; help achieve developmental milestones; hold psychological or social importance;

and are likely to be the longest relationships that most people experience in their lives

(Gamble, Yu & Kuehn, 2011; Kernan, 2005; McCormick, 2010; Pfouts, 1976). Despite social

workers' emphasis on joint sibling placements, research reveals mixed perspectives about

what is considered the best interests of the children (Leichtentritt, 2013).

Research shows that sibling relationships are emotionally powerful and critically

important not only in childhood, but over the course of a lifetime serving as the foundation

for future relationship construction (Bonacci, 2012; Branje, Van Lieshout, Van Aken, &

Haselager, 2004; Church, 2013; Hindle, 2000; Singer, 2002; Ullmann-Gheri & Weiss, 2013;

Ward, 1984). "The unique relationships shared between siblings have, throughout recorded

history, been a source of comfort and conflict; identification and individualization; and a

point of reference used to gauge one's place in the family and the world at large" (Shlonsky,

Elkins, Bellamy & Ashare, 2005b, p. 693). Therefore, social workers place the emphasis on

maintaining sibling connections; however, there is a lack of research that promote the

benefits of sustaining sibling relationships, or in contrast, the effects of sibling separation

(Bank & Kahn, 1997; Cutler, 1984; Perlman, 1967; Rast & Rast, 2002; Smith, 1996; Staff & Fein, 1992).

The research pertaining to joint or separate sibling placement is inconsistent (Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2010; Hegar, 1988; Kim, 2001; Pfouts, 1976; Rees & Pithouse, 2014; Shlonsky, Webster & Needell, 2003; Stocker, 1994). Social workers' placement decisions are influenced by foster home availability, geographical location, skills of foster parents, and foster parents desire to have siblings placed in their home (Brown & Calder, 2000; Groza, Maschmeier, Jamison & Piccola, 2003; Linares, Li, Shrout, Brody, & Pettit, 2007; Miron, Sujan, & Middleton, 2013; Shlonsky et al., 2005b; Smith, 1998). However, these conditions are not necessarily significant given that   separate placements are considered only when the safety and well-being of one or more of the children in the sibling group is compromised (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2011; Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Leathers, 2005; Rothschild & Pollack, 2013; Waid, 2014). In these situations, social workers must consider the complex factors that can affect the likelihood of positive foster care outcomes (Revans, 2007).

The purpose of this research is to explore social workers' perspectives of sibling separation in foster care. This paper provides a literature review of sibling placement in foster care and applies an AOP framework to explore social workers' practice in NL. The research was conducted using a mixed method approach of both qualitative and quantitative data gathering. The goals of the research are to (1) document the perceptions of social workers in NL regarding separating siblings in foster care; (2) share the findings with the stakeholders and child welfare agencies; and (3) suggest recommendations to stakeholders and child welfare agencies regarding the potential benefits of sibling

separation while in foster care. The paper will conclude with a presentation of the findings, and a discussion of the implications for social work practice.

Policy, Practice, and Sibling Placement: Context

When children are abused by their parents and are unable to remain safely in their homes, social workers normally decide to remove the children and place them in foster care. Legislation in NL dictates that all relevant factors in children's lives be considered when determining the best interests of the children (*Children and Youth Care and Protection Act*, 2010; CSSD, 2011; 2014b), both in the preservation of family as well as stability and permanency for children's care. Following these guidelines, planning children's care has become increasingly complex and further compound how best to support sibling groups. In rare situations, social workers question the benefit to place siblings in care together or separately. This question is important; however, Boer and Spiering (1991) argue that "we have yet little empirically based knowledge that allows us to answer this question with any certainty" (p. 291).

Child Welfare Policies and Practices

Child welfare policies and practices demonstrate a commitment to keeping siblings together in foster care placements. These practices seem motivated by the belief that "together placements help to maintain sibling bonds and help to minimize some of the trauma associated with the parent-child separation" (Albert & King, 2008, p. 540). When siblings are placed in foster care, they are often separated and placed in different homes for several reasons including child based needs and characteristics (Drapeau, Simard, Beaudry, & Charbonneau, 2000; Miron et al., 2013; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Staff & Fein, 1992); foster

families' desires or abilities to care for siblings; or lack of foster home placements (Church, 2013; Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2010; Hegar, 1986; 1988; Leathers, 2005; McCormick, 2010). This separation can have a profound impact on siblings' ability to remaining connected to each other physically and emotional. Tarren-Sweeney and Hazell (1982) suggest that "children in care, like all children, have very diverse sibling relationships, ranging from intensely positive to abusive. Some siblings remain strongly attached to each other despite prolonged separation, while others demonstrate superficial or conflictual relationships" (cited in Davidson-Arad & Klein, 2011, p. 2153). Regardless of the relationship that siblings have, it is necessary to preserve these relationships for children when they enter the foster care system (Shlonsky et al., 2003; Ward, 1984), but what creates confusion is how these relationships are best preserved. As argued previously, the social work literature and social workers strongly support joint sibling placements. Based on this premise, children are naturally placed into foster care together; but is this the only option that foster children have? Can sibling relationships and bonds be preserved if and when separate placements are sought?

Sibling Placement in Foster Care

The concept of sibling separation in the realm of foster care has long been debated. Overall, literature has shown that the concept of what constitutes sibling separation includes siblings placed together, separately, or placed with some siblings but not others (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2011; Webster, Shlonsky, Shaw, & Brookhart, 2005). As a subsystem within the larger family system, siblings form a unique and strong bond that affects the quality of parent-child relationships and deserves a great deal of attention from social workers (Groza et al., 2003; Hegar, 1988a). The final decision on sibling placement "should

be based on the needs and wishes of the children rather than on administrative expediency or difficulty in finding homes" (Ward, 1984, p. 322) and would be better suited "in the context of the total needs of the child" (Whelan, 2003, p. 34). This premise necessitates social workers' careful and thorough planning for siblings' placement.

Sibling relationships vary greatly in both positive and negative qualities and yet there is little consistency in considering these qualities during pre-placement planning (Cutler, 1984). Social workers generally argue that evidence such as continued contact with siblings; support and positive relationships with family; children displaying less emotional and behavioral problems; and an increased likelihood of reunification with parents, supports joint placements (Albert & King, 2008; Aldridge & Cautley, 1976; Branje et al., 2004; Davidson-Arad & Klein, 2011; Drapeau et al., 2000; Hegar, 1986; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009; Leichtentritt, 2013; Stocker, 1994; Tarren-Sweeny & Hazell, 2005; Thorpe & Swart, 1992; Webster et al., 2005). Conversely, a less popular perspective exists albeit among a minority of research and literature. Slowly but increasingly, yet tentatively, evidence is begging to support separate foster care placements for siblings based on the unique needs of the children including: behavioural concerns between and among the siblings; excessive and unhealthy dependency on one another; negative sibling relationships; finding and maintaining foster homes; and the size and age of sibling groups (Boer & Spiering, 1991; Hegar, 1988; Rothschild & Pollack, 2013; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Smith, 1996; Whelan, 2003). Therefore, increasingly, it is acknowledged that placing sibling in foster care together or separately, needs to consider a more nuanced approached than previously done.

Social workers must balance policy, professional standards, best practice, as well as children's racial and cultural values and needs to ensure the best interests of children are being met. When siblings are not placed together, social workers are challenged to help the

children maintain contact with each other (Child Welfare Information Gateway [CWIG], 2013; James et al., 2008; Shlonsky et al., 2005a; Smith, 1998; Timberlake & Hamlin, 1982; Ullmann-Gheri & Weiss, 2013). Regardless of their experiences, children in foster care need to feel a sense of connectedness with their siblings; family connectedness is an integral part of children's identity. The loss of sibling connectedness can have significant lifelong consequences (Hindle, 2000; Singer, 2002) for children in foster care. Children in long term foster care naturally tend to lose contact with members of their families and have already had experiences which may impact their life outcomes (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003; Hollows & Nelson, 2006). In NL, the geographical topography such as large distances between communities, a largely rural population and the lack of appropriate foster homes may contribute to siblings being separated and likely placed far distances from each other. In spite these challenges, Fowler (2008) notes that 75% of children in foster care in the province, with siblings, maintained regular contact. This suggests that children can be supported to successfully maintain connections with siblings in geographically challenging situations. While siblings' placement in foster care is influenced by multiple individual, dyadic, and systemic variables (Linares et al., 2007), the final decision "should be based on the needs and wishes of the children rather than on administrative expediency or difficulty in finding homes" (Ward, 1984, p. 322). When children are being placed into foster care, to what extent is an AOP perspective used?

Anti-Oppressive Social Work Practice in Child Welfare

Anti-oppressive practice is commonly used as the primary practice modality among social workers in child welfare agencies. Canadian schools of social work educate social workers to enable them to development of knowledge and skills enabling them to practice

empathetically; be cognizant of their lived experiences and how those experiences influence

their perspectives, and they are encouraged to become aware of the power differences

between them and service users (Collings, 2008). In addition, attention to service users'

experiences of systemic oppression and practice to reduce marginalization has become core

elements of social work education and social justice (de Montigny, 2011; Mullings, 2013).

This education prepares social workers to advocate on behalf of and with service users to

access services and resources they otherwise would not be able to. Social workers are

expected to assist families to access services and resources to help them become more

empowered to navigate and challenge the child welfare system that often pathologies poor

parents, Aboriginal and racialized families, and other groups that are generally

disadvantaged in society.

      With the confidence of formal social work education, many social workers embrace

an AOP approach. There are two schools of thoughts on the AOP framework: one suggests

that many social workers struggle to integrate this practice approach within the

organizational structures primarily motivated by neoliberalism (Barnoff & Moffatt, 2007).

The other, which will be discussed in the critique of AOP, suggests that the framework can

be ineffective and often recreates the very discrimination that social workers are

attempting to mitigate. AOP encompasses a variety of approaches (Mullaly, 2009) and is

understood as a stance which is "not a formula or a prescription that works every time in

every situation" (Baines, 2011, p. 23). With an AOP approach, it is imperative that social

workers remain open to new ideas, and question the social world which the profession

attempts to influence. Specifically, social workers who use an AOP approach seek to

address issues of diversity, difference, and inclusion; rid social injustices created by

structures of dominance and privilege by promoting equity, inclusion, transformation, and

social justice, both within and beyond social work practice (Barnoff & Moffatt, 2007; Brown, 2012; Mullaly, 2009). Theoretically, an AOP framework demands that practitioners are critically conscious of themselves and the contexts of their work and those with whom they provide services to. Social workers are required to critically reflect and self-interrogate by examining their own biases, power and privilege, understand its implications, and decide how to incorporate the same into practice and research (Baines, 2011; Fay, 2011). In practice, do social work practitioners always employ AOP and explore their own power, privilege, and their implications?

Contemporary child welfare work focuses more on enforcing white, Eurocentric socially acceptable standards of parenting. These values and norms are based the white, two-parent, heterosexual, able-bodied family (Dumbrill, 2003; Gosine & Pon, 2011). There is an inherent and undeniable power differential between social workers and the family they are mandated to work with. Social workers decide every aspect of the family's life: they determine that families need services based on specific criteria; they make service plan priorities, and they decide when to end or re-engage service. Most significantly, the social worker has the power to decide whether children remain in care or return to live with their families. Although an AOP framework can have positive implications for working with services users in child welfare agencies, there are struggles to integrate such a framework into practice due to its roots in neoliberalism. Coupled with this, there is a fear that such an approach perpetuates the same discrimination that social workers are attempting to mitigate. With the child welfare agencies focusing on contemporary work, it is questionable if social workers can indeed work in an AOP framework, or is child welfare practice automatically laden with Eurocentric standards of parenting?

Locating the Researcher

My experience as a social worker and my sense of connection with the study respondents led to some internal conflicts over reporting the results in a way that would allow social workers' experiences, pertaining to siblings in foster care, to be appropriately disseminated yet not interpreted as disloyal. In my role, I have worked with and supported children, youth, families, and foster parents from different backgrounds, and through critical reflection, I realize that multiple experiences influence my knowledge, understanding, and practice. I am white; heterosexual; middle-class; married; disabled and a female social worker and these characteristics help define who I am as an individual and as a professional; even though most are from a privileged position. As McIntosh (1998) points out, my white privilege, and I would argue my sexual orientation, class and to a certain extent gender, are like invisible knapsacks that influence how I practice social work. Bishop (2002) further explains that "all members of this society grow up surrounded by oppressive attitudes; we are marinated in it. It runs in our veins; it is as invisible to us as the air we breathe" (p. 114). How we conceive the world arises from how we live in the world, not just as individuals, but as members of society. As social workers, we need to examine the lived details of our actual practice as well as those of the families with whom we work; we must first understand our roles as oppressors to create a space for deeper empathy and understanding (de Montigny, 2013; Dumbrill, 2003).

Social work practices, particularly in child welfare are laden with neo-liberal, patriarchal, white, Western-world ideologies and values (Baskin, 2006; 2013; Jones, 2001; Pon, 2009). The fate of children, parents, and their families are held with those with power and privilege. Social workers assess families using their invisible knapsacks and make

decisions whether to remove children from their families, with little regard to historical, cultural, or societal impacts. Utilizing AOP in child welfare only perpetuates the discourses of dominance in which it is immersed. Social workers need to relinquish preset beliefs and professional training to effectively listen to how individuals describe their own issues (Dumbrill, 2003; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). As Cowie (2010) states:

> Social work discourse must move beyond conceptions of cultural competence that frame cultural diversity as problematic, toward perspectives that not only legitimize but actively engage with and support individuals. Social workers must also embark on a journey as individuals in order to locate their own personal histories, privileges and power within the system that continues to impact heavily upon lives (p. 46).

It is not enough for social workers to speak of social justice without considering the location in which they speak from, rather, to promote social justice, "self-reflexive practice and ongoing social analysis are essential components of AOP" (Baines, 2011, p. 7). Social workers must understand how their own experiences and family values may impact their understanding of the individuals and families with whom they work.

Methodology

The research was guided by the following questions: (1) What are the experiences of social workers working with and supporting siblings in NL? (2) Under what condition would separating siblings support the development of each child in the sibling group? and (3) What do social workers think about the idea of separating siblings who are in foster care? The research was conducted using a mixed method approach to data collection, which was achieved using an anonymous online survey tool. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a single survey allowed for the integration of these tools to answer questions of importance (Grinnell, Gabor & Unrau, 2012; Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002); provided the opportunity to gather data from different perspectives due to the complexity

of research (Sale et al., 2002); and helped to expand the research in a way that a single approach could not. The utilization of the online survey was based on its use in a diverse population group as well as its wide application (Bisman & Hardcastle, 1999).

The criteria for participants included: social workers who have experience working with and supporting siblings in foster care. Social workers are often one of the primary decisions makers for children who enter foster care and the primary contact for foster parents providing care to these children. The key informant, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers (NLASW) posted a call for participants via their social worker email subscription list-serve which provided information about the research project including letters of introduction, recruitment flyer, and project information (Appendix B). The documents introduced the researcher, identified the purpose of the research, and provided brief information pertaining to the research. The accompanying recruitment flyer (Appendix C) provided a website link to additional information about the research, introduction to the survey, consent form for participation, research project information, benefits and risks of participating in the research, and the survey tool (Appendix D and E).

The research was designed with an anonymous online survey tool as the method of data collection. The survey consisted of 17 quantitative questions ranging from those collecting basic demographics to more specific open-ended qualitative questions that sought to collect the experiences, thoughts, and perceptions of social workers in relation to the possibility and context of separating siblings in foster care (Appendix F). The aim was to collect data from 15-20 respondents who have worked or are working in the child welfare system in NL. Written responses from social workers were analyzed by grouping the data into themes and identifying similarities and links by constant comparison (Boeije,

2000; Glaser, 1965). This process provided the opportunity to identify themes and sub-

themes in relation to social worker's thoughts and opinions on sibling placement in foster

care. During the writing process, peer validity was utilized to ensure accuracy of

interpretation of the ideas and contexts and the collection of valid data and information by

including systemic discussion throughout the research process to assist in minimizing

biases (Bisman & Hardcastle, 1999; Roberts & Greene, 2002). Through the establishment of

reliability, challenging assumptions, considering alternative interpretations, and managing

subjectivities, peer validity provided an opportunity for improved creditability as a

researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As qualitative research, does not typically attempt to provide findings that may be

generalized to a larger population, a large sample size for this study was less important than

collecting rich and thickly detailed data. The 20 respondents who participated in this study

provided information about their experiences working as social workers in the child

welfare system, and this number of respondents was large enough to provide themes across

the data along with a diversity of experiences that brought complexity to the analysis.

In conducting this study, methodological limitations were experienced including:

the recruitment of participants; supporting research; sample size, relevance, and

generalization; and definitions. List-serves were used to distribute information and the

survey was posted online. The use of technology potentially limited the respondents to

those with Internet and subscribed to the social work public list-serves. In addition,

although the number of expected respondents was met, the sample size was small thus

potentially increasing the variability. In spite these limitations, this research brings a

unique perspective to how siblings are placed in foster care and highlights important policy

and practice implications for social workers.   The study does not offer a nuanced approach

to exploring sibling placement and as mentioned the demographic of the respondents are adults over 18 years old, primarily white, able-bodied, middle-class, married, and educated women. This therefore only affords a limited perspective from a politically dominant group of professional workers. Further children were excluded from the selection criterion. In addition, much of the previous research was conducted in the United States of America. Although there are some similarities, child welfare policies, standards, principles, guidelines, and legislation in Canada are different from those in the USA; therefore, the research findings cannot be uncritically applied to the rest of NL or Canada. Finally, an inclusive or child-centered definition of the terms siblings, brothers and/or sisters was absent which meant respondents had to provide their own definition and meanings of terms.

Findings

Participant Demographics

The sample consisted of 20 respondents with 90% of those being female; all identified as Caucasian/White and ranged in age from 18 to 59 years of age with the majority (60%) between the ages of 30 to 39 years. Of the sample, 16 social workers (80%) identified as being married and 70% of all respondents residing in small or rural population centers described as having less than 1,000 to 29,999 residents. Most respondents (90%) have a Bachelor of Social Work degree, with the remainder having a Master of Social Work degree (10%); and all were employed at least 40 hours per week (Figure 3-1). There is limited research on the profile of social workers in child protection; however, researchers
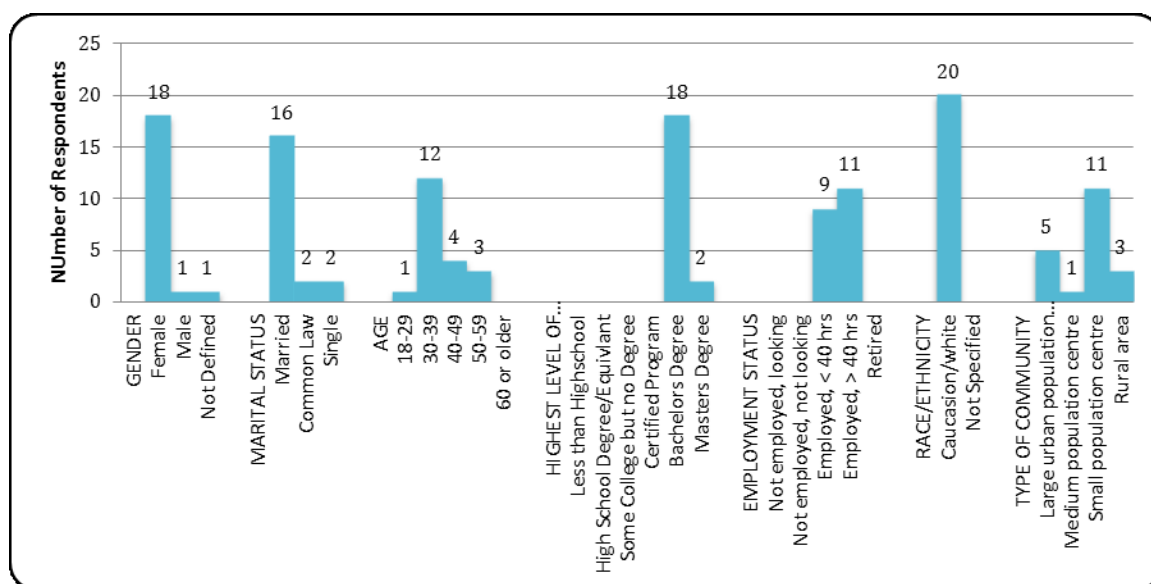
Figure 3-1: Demographic information of social worker respondents

such as Lwin, Lefebvre, Fallon, & Trocme (2015) and Zell (2006) provide similar

demographics to those found within this study. Most notably, both researchers identify

social workers in child welfare as primarily Caucasian, female, and holding a Bachelor's

degree. Similar age characteristics were also noted as ranging between 26 and 44 years.

Specific to their foster care experience, 65% have between 5 to 10 years' experience,

while 20% have 10 or more years' experience (Figure 3-2). Similarly, 40% of the

respondents identified as having between 3 and 7 years' experience working specifically

with foster siblings, and an equal number (40%) have between 7 and 10 or more years'

experience (Figure 3-3). In addition to the demographic information, social workers were

asked to choose a statement which best described their thoughts on sibling placements in
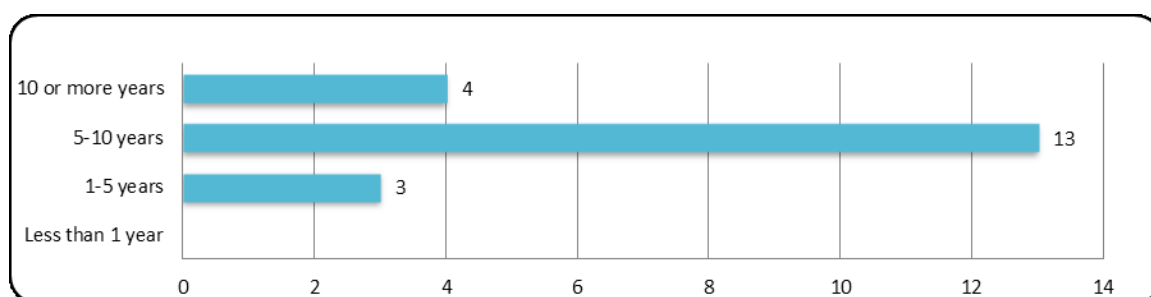

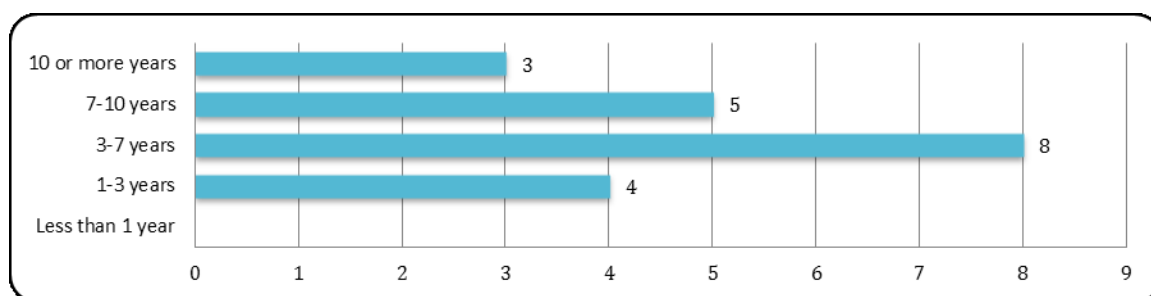Figure 3-2: Length of time working with foster children

Figure 3-3: Length of time working with foster siblings

foster care. Of the respondents, 70% felt foster siblings should always be placed together when entering foster care and 30% felt that siblings should sometimes be placed together.
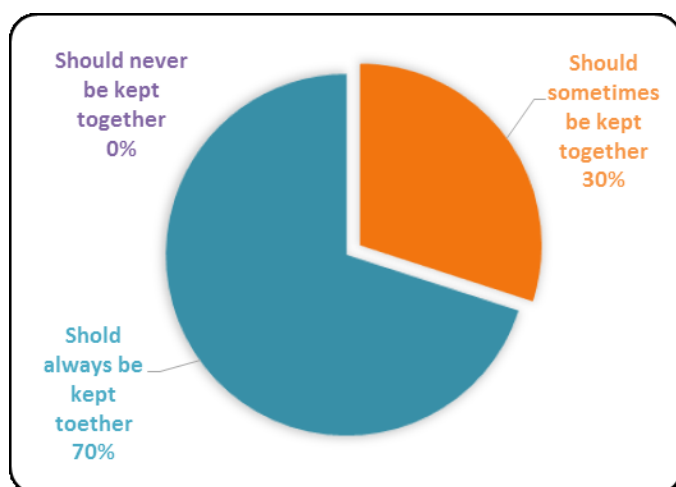

Figure 3-4: Keeping siblings together in the same foster home

None of the respondents felt that foster siblings should never be placed together (Figure 3-4). Child welfare policies pertaining to the placement of siblings strongly support their joint placement, unless such a placement would not be in the best interest of the children (Church, 2013; Timberlake & Hamlin, 1982; Whelan, 2003). These policies and the findings gathered through this study are consistent with the literature pertaining to siblings entering the foster care system.

Qualitative Findings

The following section provides findings and analysis from the qualitative, open-ended questions as well as discussion. All respondents stated that siblings should always or

sometimes be placed together and qualified these with specific narratives. Using Grinnell &

Unrau, 2005 and Padgett, 2008, data reduction strategies, responses from each question

were reviewed for similarities, and ideas or rationale of similar nature were grouped

together in categories. Identified categories were later collapsed into sub-categories. These

sub-categories were reviewed for themes which were grouped together.

Themes

Social worker respondents were asked to choose a statement which best described

their thoughts on sibling placement in foster care and to further explain their choice (Table

3-1). The following constitutes the combined responses of the qualitative questions

gathered from social workers as grouped into themes.

Which statement best describes your thoughts on keeping siblings together, in the same
home, while in foster care?

- Should always be kept together
- Should sometimes be kept together
- Should never be kept together

Please describe your answer to the above question.

Table 3-1: Social worker open ended questions about sibling placement

Siblings should always be kept together. Themes were identified by social

workers supporting siblings being placed jointly as follows: a) sibling bonds and

relationships and b) family connections and identity.

Sibling bonds and relationships. As demonstrated in the literature, social workers

acknowledge the importance of sibling bonds and relationships (Boer & Spiering, 1991;

Groza et al., 2003; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009; 2011). One social worker shared:

> I think siblings should always be kept together as they grow up in the same home with parent/parents. That when they are removed from that environment if they are kept together at least they have each other.

While sibling bonds and relationships were identified as important factors to keep siblings together, it was also overwhelming felt that family connection was important.

Family connections and identity. Social workers felt strongly that siblings ought to be kept together during their placement and time in foster care. As one social worker commented, "it is important to maintain familial bonds to children in foster care; it is important for their identity". To further support sibling connections one social worker shared:

> I believe that children first bond within their own family, despite the circumstances and therefore the only positive bond a child may have is their sibling. Children, no matter what age or stage always want to know their roots and their family and having this connection while being a child in care can be crucial to emotional growth and well-being.

The sense of bonding and sibling attachment is supported in the literature pertaining to foster care and the placement of siblings (Bonacci, 2012; Branje et al., 2004; Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Kernan, 2005; Miron et al., 2013; Rees & Pithouse, 2014). Social workers acknowledge the importance of joint placements; however, they also place emphasis on ensuring siblings remain connected with each other if they are separated. Social workers expressed their views on the importance of siblings being geographically close and having consistent and regular contact by recognizing the need between the placement of siblings and the maintenance of sibling placements:

> CYFS should always endeavor to place sibling groups together in the same home, and if not in the same home, at least in the same geographical area and prioritize the need for the children to be connected. There is a difference between placing siblings together and maintaining sibling placements. In my experience, I saw that

maintaining some sibling groups in the same home as they got older was often a challenge, and the separation of older sibling groups was as beneficial to the individual sibling as it was to keep them together in the same placement.

This view supports not only the need for placement consideration of siblings entering and remaining in foster care, but also the crucial element of keeping siblings connected. Placing siblings together in the same home is not always an option for social workers. When joint placement is not possible, the priority is placed on keeping foster siblings connected and helping the children to maintain their relationships (Church, 2013; CWIG, 2013; Groza et al., 2003; James et al., 2008).

Being committed to siblings remaining in contact with each other may suggest that social workers work from an AOP approach. Although social workers have the skills to deal with crisis situations such as sibling placements, siblings have unique knowledge about their own families and can sometimes help to inform placement choices. As noted earlier, social workers can reproduce racism and oppression in their practice if they are not cognizant of their own privilege and the power relations between themselves and the user populations (de Montigny, 2013).

Siblings should sometimes be kept together. Social workers identified circumstances when different placement options should be supported or explored, outside siblings always being placed together. The following themes emerged from respondents' response to qualify their meanings: a) safety, abuse and maltreatment; b) individual needs and characteristic; c) limited placement options.

Safety, abuse, and maltreatment. Respondents suggest that safety issues ought to be consider when deciding if siblings are to be placed jointly or separately; one social

worker shared: "siblings should always be kept together unless being placed together creates a risk or negatively impacts the safety of the placement". To further support this perspective, another suggests:

> There are some specific circumstances whereby siblings should not be placed together, particularly if one sibling has been the abuser or perhaps has a diagnosis or issues that put the other child at risk.

Social worker respondents recognize the importance of joint sibling placements, positive sibling relationships, and resolving issues among siblings; however, they also acknowledge that joint placements may not be appropriate at times. What has been echoed throughout the responses is the need to ensure that siblings remain connected if they are placed in separate foster homes. One respondent stated:

> Sometimes siblings do not get along to the point physical and emotional harm maybe inflicted by one or both siblings on each other. When this is the case, placements should be in close proximity to each other and services put in place to aid in the development of a positive relationship.

Coupled with this, another social worker acknowledged that separation should only occur until concerns are resolved:

> I would typically support siblings being placed together in the same home, unless there are exceptional circumstances (i.e. one sibling sexually abusing another in the same foster home). In cases where abuse has continued in the foster home, I would support them being separated until the abusive matters are mitigated.

In addition to the overall safety of children and siblings in foster care, social workers appear to consider the best interests of each child. A respondent stated:

> For the most part I would support siblings residing in the same home. However, there are times when the best interest of one or more children may be impacted negatively by the other children and this would need to be considered.

The basic premise of child welfare is to ensure the safety and well-being of children

(CSSD, 2011; 2014a; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Fowler, 2008; Hutchison &

Charlesworth, 2000; Zell, 2006). This does not end when a child is removed from their

parents and placed in foster care; rather there is a heightened responsibility and liability as

the child welfare system, is now making decisions on behalf of and for foster children.

Individual needs and characteristics. Social workers agree with research

suggesting different characteristics among siblings may warrant separating them in foster

care (Church, 2013; Hegar, 1986; McCormick, 2010; Shlonsky et al., 2003; Staff & Fein,

1992). Social workers acknowledge the significance of keeping sibling connected when

they are unable to be placed together. One social worker discussed thoughts on the

possibility of separate placements in relation to meeting the needs of individual children:

> There is a difference between placing siblings together and maintaining sibling
> placements. In my experience, I saw that maintaining some sibling groups in the
> same home as they got older was often a challenge, and the separation of older
> sibling groups was as beneficial to the individual sibling as it was to keep them
> together in the same placement.

In this sense, the importance of the individual sibling becomes paramount to ensuring

needs are met, as children who are removed from their parents have often faced periods of

chronic maltreatment, abuse, and trauma; all of which create an atmosphere of individual

needs that require specific care while in foster care (Alder, 1970; Boer & Spiering, 1991;

Ward, 1984). Social workers acknowledge the multifaceted layers of children's needs when

entering foster care; however, they do not explicitly identify the needs of racialized and

marginalized sibling groups. If the siblings' racial identities are not considered in placement

options, it is difficult to ascertain if social workers are practicing from an AOP approach.

Questioning the practice approach is important given that social workers placement

decisions are made within the bureaucratic framework of individual agency. Therefore,

placement considerations need to be based around what would most benefit foster siblings.

Although not a common response, one social worker suggests:

> Based on their individual needs, sometimes siblings need to be separated from
> living in the same home. Connections still need to be supported and encouraged;
> however, living in the same home may not meet each child/sibling individual need.

Social workers discussed individual needs as a part of family dynamics. Principles

of advocacy, social justice, and client participating are important in practicing from an AOP

approach. One of the contentious issues in child welfare social work practice is siblings'

safety and particularly in the notion of the best interest of the child. Social workers''

defection of safety generally conflicts with parents' view of safety. However, from the social

worker's' perspective safety is paramount and decisions about removing children from

their homes and families are challenging. In many cases, social worker's reaction to

children and the decisions that they make are generally not anti-oppressive by any standard

(RF). Although social workers felt strongly that foster siblings should be placed and kept

together in foster care, they acknowledge that there are family-related situations which

would dictate the need for separate placements. One such situation encompasses the

dynamics of individual children, between siblings, and between parents. Based on these

premises, one social worker noted that "there may be circumstances within the sibling

dynamics that would potentially place the children at risk if placed in the same home

together". Social workers also suggest that the relationship between and among siblings

and parents, the abuse children experienced and developmental level, diagnosis might

benefit children's separation. Social workers also recognize the structural limitations of

placement options for siblings noting that joint sibling placements may not always occur because of limited or inappropriate placements options.

Limited placement options. Social workers in this research try to place siblings jointly; however, as Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Leathers, 2005; and Miron et al., 2013 found, systemic issues such as limited numbers or inappropriate foster care homes can create barriers. One social worker noted the issue of foster home placements being limited to the number of children they can provide care to:

> Or, if foster placements are not approved for the number of siblings, unable to care for siblings, etc. However, I believe we should be taking all efforts to ensure consistent sibling contact is maintained regardless of the placement situation.

Regardless of the issues or decisions around placement of siblings, social workers want to ensure siblings remain connected, and this is consistent with the literature pertaining to foster sibling placement (CWIG, 2013; Groza et al., 2003; Hindle, 2000; James et al., 2008; Smith, 1998; Ullmann-Gheri & Weiss, 2013).

Social workers have identified factors and circumstances whereby consideration for sibling separation in placement can be considered. What has not been discussed is the length of time that children should be separated if this has been deemed necessary. Social workers have alluded to the fact that if the reason for separation has been mitigated, that the children should be reunited; however, there has not been any determination as to this process.

Siblings should never be kept together. None of the social worker respondents identified a need or rationale for siblings never to be placed together when entering or while in foster care and this finding coincide with other research which argue for joint

sibling placements (Albert & King, 2008; Aldridge & Cautley, 1976; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009; Leichtentritt, 2013; Linares et al., 2007; Tarren-Sweeny & Hazell, 2005; Thorpe & Swart, 1992; Webster et al., 2005).

Discussions

This study explored the context and possibility of separating sibling placed in foster care. While social work participants did not identify AOP as an approach from which they consider sibling placements, it is worth noting given that historically, NL has had a large Indigenous sibling group population in care (Fowler, 2008). In addition, given the provincial multiculturalism policy and the efforts to attract and retain immigrants, the province is experiencing an increase in racialized populations, especially Black and Middle-Eastern families. As noted previously, these groups are traditionally scrutinized and have large percentages of their child in the care of child welfare agencies (Blackstock, 2009; Gough, Trocme, Brown, Knoke & Blackstock, 2005; Mullings, 2007; 2010). Notwithstanding, the lack of mentioning an AOP approach, the perspective and practice of social workers in this study parallels the research which suggests that placing siblings jointly outweighs separating them. Social workers acknowledged the importance of joint sibling placements and various circumstances in which joint placements are not feasible. Social workers understand the significance of sibling relationships for emotional well-being and lifelong sibling relationships (Kernan, 2005) but does it mean that they understand the needs of racialized and Aboriginal siblings, and if so, how is that demonstrated? In response to possible separation, respondents suggest that siblings need to remain in close contact regardless of geographic location. Social workers in this study seem to agree that "for children entering care, siblings can serve as a buffer against the worst effects of harsh

circumstances" (CWIG, 2013, p. 4) and can provide each other with the stability and emotional support they need when separated from their parents and families (Bank & Kahn, 1997; Boer & Spiering, 1991; Branje et al., 2004; Wojciak, McWey & Helfrich, 2013). While respondents' belief and practice support the literature, they are open to exploring separating siblings when children's mental or physical health is at risk. Despite the gap in literature to support and guide social workers' separating siblings (Tarren-Sweeney & Hazell, 2005), child welfare practitioners in NL appear to be charting a new course in managing and recognizing different ways to work in the best interest of each child among siblings rather than focusing on the siblings as a single entity.

The consensus amongst respondents in this study again corroborate findings in other research which show that separation and loss which is inherent with foster care placements are compounded for siblings who are separated (Sripathy, 2004; Timberlake & Hamlin, 1982). However, this research has responded to the gap in the literature by building on the small body of research that explore the question of separate foster care placements for siblings and the conditions under which this practice may be considered. This perspective is not readily available or supported in the literature; therefore, further research is needed with larger sample populations to determine the extent to which social workers support this notion and are willing to implement it.

Social workers discussed several aspects of supporting children in foster care including placing them in care jointly or separately. Studies suggest that poor children and other disadvantaged children are increasingly scrutinized by authorities and are likely to be apprehended and taken into care. In some provinces, Aboriginal and black children are significantly overrepresented in foster care when compared to their population (Blackstock, 2009; Gough et al, 2005; Mullings, 2007; 2010); it is worth noting these troubling conditions

even if data is unavailable for NL. More importantly, social workers are generally educated to practice with an AOP lens. The research questions did not ask workers to comment on their practice lens and none added this information. However, as discussed earlier, social workers' use of an AOP lens can be oppressive if critical consciousness and attending to inherent power relations are not acknowledged. Is there a way to implement critical AOP in sibling placement, how might it benefit children when they are placed in foster care?

Conclusion

This research explored the context and possibility of separating siblings, who enter the foster care system, from the perspectives of social workers. The utilization of a mixed method approach distinguishes it from other research specific to siblings as social workers were provided with the opportunity to describe, in their own words, the context under which sibling placements and the possibility for separation could occur. The ideas and concepts presented by the social workers in this research were consistent with other literature pertaining to siblings in foster care. Support for joint placement of siblings continues to be paramount; however, social workers do recognize that there are situations where separating foster siblings are necessary and must be considered. During these deliberations, an AOP lens can be applied to provide the best service for children in care.

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CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

This research explored foster parents and social workers' perception of joint and separate

sibling placement in foster care. As a social worker employed in foster care and adoptions, I

am responsible for assisting with decisions pertaining to foster home placement as well as

monitoring and ensuring the safety and well-being of children who enter the foster care

system. In this capacity, I examine and make decision around child placement and more

specifically, sibling placement. Current research and literature primarily support joint

sibling placement; however, there is a gap in the literature; this study questions the logic

and benefits of placing siblings together, in the same foster home, and suggests that joint

placement may not be in children's best interest.

In my experience, joint sibling placements are not always the best, most appropriate

or acceptable measure for children. Siblings have complex needs which need to be taken

into consideration when placement with their brothers and/or sisters is being assessed. It

is well established in the social work profession that sibling connections and bonding is

extremely important to foster healthy and appropriate attachments and relationships;

however, does connection and bonding automatically equate to the need to place siblings in

the same foster home?

When children are unable to live safely at home with their caregivers or extended

family, child welfare agencies assume responsibility for their well-being (Hindle, 2000).

Although foster care is disruptive to children and families, it is sometimes a necessary step

to mitigate and eliminate risk. The decisions to place children into the foster care system

are not taken lightly and are often a complex and difficult decision for child welfare social

workers. When coupled with the added layer of siblings, these decisions often become

contentious and increasingly challenging.

Factors that influence placement patterns support joint sibling placements which

include: continued contact, support, and positive relationships; experiencing less emotional

and behavioral problems; and an increased likelihood of reunification with parents.

Conversely, research supports separate placements for siblings based on the unique needs

of the children; behavioural concerns; excessive unhealthy dependence on one another;

negative sibling relationships; finding and maintaining foster homes; and the size and age of

sibling groups.

The *Child and Youth Care and Protection Act* (2010) guide children's placement in

foster care in NL and dictates that all relevant factors shall be considered when determining

the best interests of children. These factors include, the children's safety, health, and well-

being; physical, emotional, and developmental needs; relationship with family or a person

significant to the child; identity, cultural, and community connections; opinion regarding his

or her care and custody or the provision of services; and the importance of stability and

permanency in the context of their care. When children are removed from their parents,

efforts are made by social workers to ensure appropriate foster homes are available and

siblings are placed jointly.

Separating siblings when they enter, or while in foster care has consistently been a

contentions area for some child welfare social workers. Social workers are educated to

believe that children entering foster care must be placed with their siblings; however, there

is little consensus about the advantages and disadvantages of this. Gustavsson and

MacEachron (2010) note "multiple perspectives support the belief that siblings play an

important role in the development across the life span of a child. Yet, child welfare agencies

may at times be at odds with and at other times be supportive of the practices suggested by sibling literature" (p. 40). Research suggests that siblings tend to exhibit more behavioural issues when they are separated than being placed together. However, placing siblings together or separate based on perceived behavioural issues raises questions: Are the increases in children behaviors more to do with the separation or to do with their history of maltreatment? When children do better is it because of being placed with siblings or being placed into a skilled foster home? These questions among others highlight the need for further investigation into sibling placement in foster care. The following sections will provide a discussion pertaining to the research findings, theoretical and policy implications, and recommendations for future research.

Research Findings

The main findings are chapter specific and have been summarized within the respective chapters: Navigating Sibling Placement in the Child Welfare System and Sibling Placement from an Anti-Oppressive Perspective: Can it be Achieved? This section will synthesize the findings to answer the study's research questions which sought to examine and present the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of foster parents and social workers, who are involved with siblings in foster care, within the context and possibility of sibling separation.

Most foster parents and social workers agree that placing siblings together in the same foster home bodes well for maintaining their identity, providing support to one another, and helping to strengthen bonds and relationships. Their responses indicate a strong knowledge that children who enter foster care may lose more than their parents. Both groups acknowledge the importance and quality of relationships and bonds for

siblings and the need for them to be maintained. Foster parents have an understanding that siblings provide a sense of normalcy, familiarity, and security while in foster care; recognize the immediacy of the loss of family and the potential for lifelong consequences; and note siblings appear to reduce disruption and trauma associated with removal. Social workers echo these experiences in working and supporting siblings in foster care.

It is noteworthy that neither foster parents nor social workers identified racial or cultural needs and socio-economic status of siblings in foster care. This is particularly important in opposite-race and -cultural foster homes where children are likely the only ones from their race and culture. As noted in the respective chapters, there are studies that suggest child welfare agencies are increasingly investigating and placing disadvantage children in foster care; particularly the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Black children. Although data is unavailable for NL, it is worth noting and recognizing these conditions.

Foster parents and social workers readily support the idea of joint sibling placements; however, have been diligent in identifying circumstances or situations which may require siblings to be separated. The main reasons put forth by both groups of respondents surround children's safety and individual needs (e.g. mental health, behaviors). Of paramount to foster parents and social workers is the safety of the child remaining in the foster home, in consideration with the individual needs of the child having to be separated. Respondents acknowledge that continuing to jointly place siblings experiences these issues is not in the best interest of the children and that addressing their individual needs outweighs siblings remaining in the same home.

The lack of empirical data creates barriers to help guide recommendations about such placements; nonetheless, child welfare work in NL appears to be strengthening its

mandate to work in the best interest of each child among siblings rather than focusing on the siblings as a single entity.

Social worker and foster parent thoughts on separating siblings who are in foster care strongly parallel the existing literature regarding the need to jointly place siblings; however, they also recognize there are times when consideration must be given to separate sibling placements. Both groups acknowledge the importance of sibling relationships and that the presence of siblings may be vital to maintaining a sense of identity, stability, and safety; particularly when separation and loss of family are compounded with the separation from siblings. Respondents, suggest that when children are separated, strong efforts should be made to ensure that the children are kept in close contact even if they are not close geographically.

Although foster parents and social workers identified specific circumstances which may result in the consideration of separate placements, none felt that siblings should be separated at all cost. The arguments that previous research have proposed in relation to separate sibling placements consistently fit with the findings of this study. Supporting siblings in their placements and attempting to place sibling jointly to maintain their relationships and identity continues to be a profound consideration of foster parents and social workers and their associated child welfare agencies.

Implications

Practice Implications

Social workers, for the most part, believe that siblings should be placed together; however, their actions are sometimes inconsistent. They are faced with the questions of

whether it is better to place all brothers and sisters together, place them individually, or to place them in sub-groups (Groza, Maschmeier, Jamison & Piccola, 2003). This research lends only minimal support to the arguments that siblings should be placed with siblings whenever possible even if the desire and practice behind sibling placement in foster care comes from child welfare legislation. As discussed by Wojciak, McWey and Helfrich (2013), "developing more concrete standards for what is reasonable in terms of efforts to place siblings together or to maintain their contact could benefit sibling relationship, which may mitigate some of the negative outcomes associated with placement in foster care" (p. 1075-1076).

Joint sibling placements have been favored and have been a child welfare guiding principle, primarily because it is believed that siblings are better able to cope with separation and loss, and being with siblings promotes a sense of safety and well-being (Albert & King, 2008; Child Welfare Information Gateway [CWIG], 2013). Clinical judgments have been used to justify separating siblings but have not necessarily been based on best practices. Challenges have arisen in attempting to keep siblings together, including: limited foster homes; availability of physical space in foster homes; inability or unwillingness of foster parents to provide care to siblings based on social locations or behaviors; lack of training to address the childrens' needs; and cultural difference. If the predominate stance for joint sibling placement is based on maintaining sibling relationships and bonds; lessening behaviors; placement stability; and having an increased likelihood of reunification with parents; are there other ways of ensuring this occurs without necessarily placing siblings jointly?

Although considerations and positive implications have been brought forth in relation to sibling placement, it does not equate to child welfare agencies drastically

changing their practices, policies, or procedures. Social workers may need to revisit how siblings are placed in foster care and give careful consideration in determining what is best for siblings who enter foster care. There is a small body of literature which supports separate placements for siblings entering foster care and this research supports some of the ideas. Is the lack of research because joint sibling placements have more positive outcomes for siblings, or is it because no one is asking these questions? Research pertaining to sibling supports both sides of placement considerations, but where focus is needed, is direct consideration to children's' individual needs and what is in their best interests. When consideration is given to this aspect of placement, decisions around placing siblings jointly or separately is not necessarily at the forefront, rather what siblings require as individuals and a group is taken into consideration.

Policy Implications

Child welfare policies and practices demonstrate a commitment to joint sibling placement. This practice seems to be motivated by need to reduce the trauma that children experience when they are removed from their families and being placed together helps to maintain important sibling bonds and relationships (Albert & King, 2008; Church, 2013). Sibling relationships vary in both positive and negative qualities, yet there is little consistency in considering these qualities during pre-placement planning (Cutler, 1984). Social workers aim to work in the best interest of children and in considering sibling placement, argue that evidence including: positive relationships with family; child's identity; less behavioral or emotional issue; and increased potential for reunification supports siblings being placed together.

Maintaining sibling relationships is important to social workers and child welfare practice, but more focus needs to be placed on determining the nature of these relationships, the benefit or harm, and if maintaining these relationships are in the children's best interest (Herrick & Piccus, 2005). In this light, social workers and researchers need to gain sufficient knowledge of the effects of sibling placement to enable them to authorize future sibling placement policies and decisions that truly serve the best interest of each foster child. This study builds on the small body of research which documents the context and possibility of sibling separation in foster care and identifies implications for policy and practice which include: providing feedback about placement practices and effects on siblings; providing information about the types of child who are at most risk of being separated from siblings, as a means to develop and promote better placement planning; and social worker and foster parent attitudes and perceptions indicate possible topics for additional training. Although the attitudes about family and sibling bonds are quite positive, training around the meaning of siblings to children in foster care could be developed based on theory and research presented.

Future Research

The current trends pertaining to sibling placement in foster care remains in its infancy. Since the early work of Hegar (1986), 30 years ago, researchers continue to identify the need for separate sibling placements (Leathers, 2005; Linares, Li, Shrout, Brody, & Pettit, 2007); however, child welfare workers are slow in accepting possibility. Although an emerging discourse, consideration and dialogue regarding sibling separation in foster care is beginning to take shape.

Additional research in this area is important, as understanding how separation and structured interventions designed for siblings affect placement outcomes is needed to appropriately plan for service provision. Foster parents and social workers' attitudes and beliefs about joint sibling placements in foster care need to be considered as starting points for future empirical investigations. One thing that is clear from the research is that foster parents and social workers have clear opinions about the nature and importance of sibling relationships. Future research would benefit from moving away from the indicators of placement type (together or separate) to more dynamic indicators such as the quality of sibling relationships, quality of interactions, organizational factors, and decision making processes; and strive to clearly define what is meant by 'siblings' to assist in comparing the findings of one piece of research to another.

More qualitative research needs to be completed on this topic. As it is a complex and emotional topic, it is important for researchers to widely disseminate their findings to a wide audience including foster parents, social workers and policy makers. In addition, it research need to include individuals who have experienced foster themselves. This may not only benefit the body of research, but may also benefit those being interviewed as it would allow them to share their experiences ad opinions on a topic that has likely impacted them tremendously.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research has been to explore the context and possibility of sibling separation in foster care. Emphasis on separation of families is a central issue in child placement practice and research; however, the amount and depth of research in sibling placement, is in its infancy. The results of the research suggest that there is a need

for a comprehensive view of sibling placement and separation; one that takes in multiple perspectives.

The research presented suggests that siblings are of great importance to each other when entering and while in foster care, and their relationships and bonds deserve attention and recognition. Consideration must be given to the varying dimensions of siblings to assist child welfare agencies in better understanding and identifying appropriate interventions, particularly as it relates to foster care placement. In doing so, this could reach far beyond the decision of whether to keep siblings together, rather place emphasis on utilizing careful assessments to determine if siblings require joint placements; ensuring siblings remain connected if separation does occur; and by treating siblings as a subsystem that requires specialized intervention and foster home placements. This research can potentially influence social workers, foster parents, or other child welfare professionals in considering the best form of placement and maintaining connections for siblings who enter the foster care system.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Email to NLFFA

Dear Ms. Dianne Molloy:

My name is Kelly Sheppard and I am a Masters student at Memorial University, School of Social Work and a practicing social worker. I am conducting a study entitled, Sibling Placement in Foster Care: Exploring the Context and Possibility of Separation. The study will explore the separation of siblings, who are in foster care, with the anticipation of answering the question: Does the desire and practice of placing siblings together in the same foster home outweigh the individual needs and best interests of these children? I am asking for your support and requesting that you forward the attached flyer to foster parents in Newfoundland and Labrador and post it in public areas in your agency.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at (709) 864-2861.

Thank you for your help. If you have any questions please contact me at (709) 596-1012 or k.sheppard@mun.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Delores Mullings at (709) 864-3419 or dmullings@mun.ca.

Best Regards,

Kelly A. Sheppard
Masters Student
Memorial University, School of Social Work
t: (709) 596-1012
e: k.sheppard@mun.ca

Appendix B: Email/Post to Social Work Listserves

Dear Social Worker:

My name is Kelly Sheppard and I am a Masters student at Memorial University, School of Social Work and a practicing social worker. I am conducting a study entitled, Sibling Placement in Foster Care: Exploring the Context and Possibility of Separation. The study will explore the separation of siblings, who are in foster care, with the anticipation of answering the question: Does the desire and practice of placing siblings together in the same foster home outweigh the individual needs and best interests of these children?

I am seeking interested social workers, who have worked or are currently working with foster children, to participate in this research study. Specifically, I am seeking input from social workers who have worked or are currently working in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. In addition to your own participation, it would be most helpful if you could forward this invitation to other social workers you may know who may be interested in participating.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at (709) 864-2861.

Thank you for your help. If you have any questions please contact me at (709) 596-1012 or k.sheppard@mun.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Delores Mullings at (709) 864-3419 or dmullings@mun.ca.

Best Regards,

Kelly A. Sheppard
Masters Student
Memorial University, School of Social Work
t: (709) 596-1012
e: k.sheppard@mun.ca

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Title:	Sibling Placement in Foster Care: Exploring the Context and Possibility of Separation
Researcher(s):	Mrs. Kelly A. Sheppard, Masters Student, School of Social Work, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Contact information: Telephone (709) 596-1012, email: k.sheppard@mun.ca.
Supervisor(s):	Dr. Delores V. Mullings, School of Social Work at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Contact information: Telephone (709) 864-3419, email: dmullings@mun.ca.

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled Sibling Placement in Foster Care: Exploring the Context and Possibility of Separation. The project is being completed by the researcher as part of the requirements for a thesis in the Master of Social Work program at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. Please take the time to read this (and all other information that you receive from the researcher) and if you would like more detail or if you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

Purpose of study:
The purpose of the research study is to explore the context and possibility of separating siblings who are in foster care.

What you will do in this study:
You are being asked to complete an online survey that will take about 20 minutes to finish. Your participation is voluntary and it is entirely your decision if you wish to participate in the research. If you choose not to take part in the research, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future. As this is an anonymous survey, there will be no future follow up or additional sessions unless you feel the necessity to contact the researcher directly.

Withdrawal from the study:
At any time in the study, you may refuse to answer any question or stop participation altogether. If you wish to end your participation, simply close the survey without submitting it. If you do submit your survey, you cannot withdraw from the research as there is no way to determine which survey is yours.

Possible benefits:
The possible benefits of you participating in this study include:

- You may feel a sense of satisfaction in being able to share your views on siblings in foster care
- The potential to offer insight that may help to develop skills and support to offer siblings in foster care
- You will be provided with an opportunity to talk about experiences and perceptions you have about siblings in foster care, and share this information where there is currently no avenue to share

Possible risks:
There may be a small risk that you may become upset when thinking and talking about foster children and siblings who are in foster care.

Foster Parents: If you become upset, sad or angry during the process of the research study, you may contact the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association at (709) 754-0213 or your designated social worker within the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. These supports work with foster families within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Social Worker: If you become upset, sad or angry during the process of the research study, you may contact your immediate supervisor or the Employee Assistance Program at (709) 729-2290. These supports can assist you in managing your thoughts and feelings around children in foster care.

What will happen after you submit your survey?
All data related to the survey will be accessed by the researcher and supervisor on secure and private computers which are password protected that only the researcher and supervisor will know.

- The data will be kept for at least 5 years as per Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly research.

- The researcher and her supervisor will have access to the finished surveys; however due to the survey's being anonymous, the researcher or supervisor will be unable to determine the identity of the participant.
- A Google survey tool will be used. This service is part of the Google for Education and is being accessed via Memorial University's MUNMail. Through this service Google does not own the information, rather it is owned by Memorial University. However, the data is stored in the United States and as such are subject to the U.S. Patriot Act, which allows authorities access to the records of internet service providers. Anonymity and confidentiality, therefore, cannot be guaranteed. If you choose to participate in this survey, you understand that your responses to the survey questions will be stored and accessed in the USA. The security and privacy policy for Google, Google for Education and Memorial University's use of this services can be found at the following links: https://www.google.com/policies/privacy/; https://www.google.com/work/apps/business/learn-more/security.html; http://studentprivacypledge.org; and http://www.mun.ca/cc/munmail/privacy.php.
- The results from this research project will be published on the School of Social Work website (www.mun.ca/socwrk) for participants to review the findings. The findings will also be published in aggregate form in peer reviewed journals, presented in short form at conferences/sessions and will be available at the QEII Library at Memorial University's campus. Information from the surveys will be included in these publications and presentations. Presentations are expected to be given to the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association; Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, as well as to two (2) Bachelor of Social Work classes and one (1) Master of Social Work class.
- Direct quotations from the surveys will be included in the report. The survey is anonymous, but if you inadvertently include names, community landmarks, locations, or any other potentially identifying information in your responses, it will be removed and information kept confidential.
- Once you submit the survey, your data cannot be removed because it is anonymous and your survey cannot be linked to your name or identity.

Questions:
You are welcome to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact: principal researcher, Kelly A. Sheppard at k.sheppard@mun.ca or by telephone at (709) 596-1012 or supervisor, Dr. Delores Mullings at dmullings@mun.ca or by telephone at (709) 864-3419.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics

policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at (709) 864-2861.

Agreement:

By checking the "I AGREE" box below:

- You have read the information about the research and the information contained in this agreement.
- You have been advised that you may ask questions about this study and receive answers prior to continuing.
- You are satisfied that any questions you had have been addressed.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw participation from the study by closing your browser window or navigating away from this page, without having to give a reason and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that this data is being collected anonymously and therefore, once you submit this survey your data cannot be removed.
- You are not giving up your legal rights and are not releasing the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

If you check "I DO NOT AGREE", you will be re-routed away from the survey.

❑ **I AGREE** to participate in the research project; I understand both the risks and benefits of taking part; that I am volunteering to be in the study; that I am giving my consent by submitting the survey; and that I may end my participation by not submitting the survey.

❑ **I DO NOT AGREE**

Please print and retain a copy of this consent information for your records.

Appendix E: Survey Introduction

Thank you for seeking more information about the project, Sibling Placement in Foster Care: Exploring the Context and Possibility of Separation. I am Kelly Sheppard and I am a Masters of Social Work student at Memorial University and practicing social worker in the province. I am interested in researching and writing about the possibility of separating siblings who are in foster care. This study looks at the placement of siblings in foster care and explores the perception of foster parents and social workers, who have worked with these children.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at (709) 864-2861.

Again, thank you for contributing to this research project.

Best regards,

Kelly A. Sheppard
Masters Student
Memorial University, School of Social Work
t: (709) 596-1012
e: k.sheppard@mun.ca

Appendix F: Research Questions

Are you a foster parent or social worker who has cared for or worked with children who are brothers and/or sisters from the same family?
No [end survey]; Yes [continue]

What is your gender? Please explain: _____

Which category below includes your age?
17 or younger; 18-20; 21-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; 60 or older

Which category below best describes your marital status? (check all that apply)
Married; Common-law; Widowed; Divorced; Separated; Never Married

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
Less than high school degree; high school degree or equivalent (i.e. GED, ABE); some college by no degree; certificate program completion (i.e. trades); bachelor's degree; master's degree

Which of the follow categories best describe your employment status?
Employed, working 40 hours or more a week; employed, working less than 40 hours per week; not employed, looking for work; not employed, not looking for work; retired; disabled, not able to work

 How do you identify your race and ethnicity? Please explain: _____

In what type of community do you live?
Large urban population center (100,000 or greater residents); medium population center (between 30,000-99,999 residents); small population center (between 1,000-29,999 residents); rural area (less than 1,000 residents)

If one of these statements applies to you, please skip to the appropriate question:

I am a foster parent who has cared for siblings (please skip to question 11); I am a social worker who has worked with siblings (please skip to question 15).

Foster Parents

Which timeline best describes your length of involvement with fostering children?
Less than 1 year; 1-5 years; 5-10 years; 10 years or more

How long did you care for the brothers and/or sisters from the same family, in your home?
Less than 1 year; 1-3 years; 3-7 years; 7-10 years; 10 years or more

Which statement best describes your thoughts about keeping brothers and/or sisters together while they are in foster care?
Should not be kept together; should sometimes be kept together; should always be kept together

Please explain your answer to question 12.

Social Workers

Which timeline best describes your length of time supporting and working with foster children?
Less than 1 year; 1-5 years; 5-10 years; 10 years or more

How long did you provide support to these children?
Less than 1 year; 1-3 years; 3-7 years; 7-10 years; 10 years or more

Which statement best describes your thoughts about keeping siblings together while they are in foster care?
Should not be kept together; should sometimes be kept together; should always be kept together

Please explain your answer to question 17.

Appendix G: Email Confirmation from NLFFA (copy)

Hi Kelly,

Depending on the timing of the letter, we could include it in our newsletter. Next one goes out in April and then July.

I could also send it out to our email list serve but I only have e-mail addresses for about half our foster parents.

Diane

Diane Molloy
Executive Director

Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association
Suite 105, 21 Pippy Place
St. John's, NL
A1B 3X2

Phone: 709-754-0213, 1-877-754-0218(toll free)
Fax: 709-754-5007
Website: www.nlffa.ca

From: Kelly A. Sheppard [mailto:k.sheppard@mun.ca]
Sent: March-07-15 1:03 PM
To: dianemolloy@nfld.net
Subject: MSW Research

Hi Dianne,
I am in the process of gaining consent from the ethical committee to complete some research for my thesis.

Primarily the research will look at the benefits and/or effects of separating siblings who are in foster care. I am looking to see if you or your organization can assist in distributing a recruitment letter when I receive the necessary consent from ethics?

I would only be looking at the Island portion of the province, as this is quite a small study initially.

Is this something that you would be able to assist with? I can send you the supporting documents and info a little later if we are able to proceed.

Thanks,
Kelly

--
Kelly A. Sheppard
e: k.sheppard@mun.ca