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The Effects of Foster Parenting on the Marital Relationships of Oklahoma Foster Parents

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my professor, Dr. Brandon Bur, who pushed me farther than I ever thought I could go and guided me every step of the way. I wouldn't be the professional I am today without your investment in me.

And

To my dog, Nala. I got through a lot of long days of writing with you by my side!

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ABSTRACT

Research has deemed the incorporation of a child into a family as a crisis because of loss of sleep, lower sexual responsiveness, economic pressures, increased chores, and stress (Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; LeMasters, 1959; Leavitt, McDaniel, Maas, & Feinberg, 2017). In addition to the universal responsibilities of caring for a child, foster parenting involves working with birth families, arranging resources for foster children, forming a secure parent-child relationship, helping children adjust, maintaining records on the child, and working with foster agencies (Rhodes, Orme, & McSurdy, 2003). Despite the unique challenges of fostering, little investigation has been done on how fostering impacts the marital relationship. The purpose of this study was to investigate how Oklahoma foster parents perceive foster parenting to have impacted their marital relationship. It was hypothesized that foster parenting would have a negative influence on foster parents' marital relationships.

Participants responded to a mixed methods online survey in the Fall of 2019. Seventy responses were used for analysis. Analysis surprisingly revealed that the participants were relatively satisfied in their relationships and did not report particularly high levels of stress. Furthermore, although participants consistently cited difficult challenges in fostering, many found fostering to have been an experience that enriched their relationship. The findings are important to note as professionals working with foster parents to consider the potential positive impact that fostering could have on foster parent well-being. In order to draw more detailed implications, additional studies with representative samples are needed.

Chapter One: Introduction

Background

Foster care is a service that provides substitute temporary parental care and support services to children ages birth to age eighteen in the Department of Human Services' (DHS) custody. According to the Oklahoma Department of Human Services there were a total of 7,933 children on the Oklahoma foster care system as of July 2019. These children received foster care services as a result of their parents being unable to care for them and/or being unsafe, abused, or neglected in their parents' care. Foster parents who open their home to children in DHS custody make foster care service delivery possible.

Statement of the Problem

The commitment of foster parenting is a large undertaking, yet it is crucial to care and service delivery in the foster care system. Providing a safe and secure home for a foster child that has experienced significant trauma can be burdensome. Foster parents take on the responsibility of working with a foster child's biological parents, attending court hearings, attending visitations, handling behavioral issues a foster child may have as a result of their past trauma, and meeting the basic needs of the child. In addition, foster parents may experience the emotional effects related to sending the foster child back to their biological parents when their case is closed, the biological parent's rights being terminated, adopting the child, and/or the burden of caring for a child that comes from a traumatic past. There are many stress factors involved in being a foster parent, and one may hypothesize that the stress may spillover into the marital relationship of the foster parents.

Marital relationships are extensively studied by researchers. Marital relationships are also studied frequently in the context of traditional parenthood. The investigation of foster parent marital relationships is less common. Seminal research has deemed the incorporation of a child

into a family as a crisis for reasons such as loss of sleep, lower sexual responsiveness between the couple, economic pressures, the increase of chores, and general stress (LeMasters, 1959). Essentially traditional parenthood has consequences that decrease marital satisfaction. When fostering, the consequences could be more extreme because of the increased responsibility and burden of caring for a child in the child welfare system. Understanding the impact of fostering on marital relationships has scientific benefits but it also poses practical benefits for foster parents and professionals working with foster parents. Understanding the impact can help foster parents prepare for the potential negative affects fostering could have on their marriage before they even begin their fostering journey as well as be mindful of the potential impact during their fostering journey.

Purpose of the Study

In order to support foster parents who are married in their role in the child welfare system and as a parent, more knowledge on the potential conflict of marital satisfaction and foster parenting roles needs to be gained. Information from this study can assist professionals in multiple roles including family life education, social work, and therapy. Knowledge gained from this study can also inform state policy makers in their role as advocates for foster children and foster parents. Being aware of the marital affects couples may experience while fostering, in addition to many other obstacles foster parents face, can help service providers ensure the well-being of foster parents and ultimately the children in their care.

Definition of Terms

child welfare- Services that work toward ensuring all children have a safe, permanent, and stable home environment.

foster parents- An individual or couple that take a child into their family without being the child's legal parents.

marital satisfaction- An attitude of greater or lesser favorability toward one's own marital relationship (Roach, Frazier, & Bowde, 1981, p. 537).

trauma- Traumatic events variously referred to as toxic stress, risk factors, child maltreatment, and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Trauma also includes events such as exposure to violence, economic hardship, and living with parents or guardians who have a problem with alcohol or drugs, are mentally ill, or have served time in prison (Murphy, Moore, Redd, & Malm, 2017, p. 23).

traditional parenthood- The practice of both the biological mother and biological father fulfilling their role as parent to their biological child.

Significance of this Study

A study on the correlation between marital satisfaction and fostering needs to be established in hopes of improving the well-being of foster parents. For example, this study could begin to explain one of the many reasons foster parents choose to close their home to placement of foster children. In the past, Ecology theory has been used to understand circumstances of foster children and foster families alike. Ecology theory works well as a lens for understanding the particular aims of this study because the theory accentuates the influence of the environment and interactions on the family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Being foster parents influences a couple's environment significantly. There are somewhat unfamiliar foster children in the home, case workers the couples interact with, child welfare rules and stipulations a foster family has to abide by, and more. These factors change the ecology of a family significantly; therefore, it is fitting to use ecology theory to understand these changes and how they may influence the marital relationship of foster parents.

The impact of fostering on the marital relationship of foster parents can have implications for multiple professions including child welfare workers, marriage and family therapists, and

family life educators; however, this investigation will particularly emphasize implications for the family life education profession. Leaders in the field of family life education have defined the profession as focusing on equipping families with knowledge and skills to enhance the well-being, strengths, and relationships through education, prevention, and a strengths-based approach (National Council on Family Relations, 2019). Furthermore, Lindsey (2001) stated in her review of practice implications of child welfare for family life educators and marriage and family therapists that certain forms of training such as marital education are outside of the scope of some professionals such as child welfare workers who work directly with foster parents. Relationship education should be conducted by family life educators who are more equipped to conduct such education.

If this project does reveal that fostering has a negative impact upon the marital state of foster parents, family life educators could be called to action in order to create and administer marital education courses for foster parents. In addition, further investigation by researchers regarding married foster parents could be warranted. Education courses could help to combat the potential negative impacts of fostering on the marital relationship and further research can provide more clarity about the issue and what practices could ameliorate the issue.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This review seeks to present what is known about the factors surrounding this problem of practice from the lens of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecology. Doing so will justify a research investigation into the subject matter. An overview of what each system of Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecology Theory encompasses will be provided. Following the overview, specific factors as they relate to married foster parents within these systems will be expanded upon in this literature review.

Theoretical Framework: *Human Ecology Theory*

Urie Bronfenbrenner contributed to the many facets of human studies by establishing the Ecological Theory of Human Development. Bronfenbrenner emphasized the importance of contextual factors in human development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) focused on how one's development is impacted by interactions within different contexts, which he deemed the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each system is nested within each other; therefore, they influence each other and the individual or family within the ecological system. These systems encompass contexts such as home, school, community, etc. and are influenced by roles, relationships, and norms (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

In Bronfenbrenner's view, development is influenced by the constant interaction of the individual and the environment. In other words, social contexts shape human development (Cox, Burr, & Blow, 2011). Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized that if experiences and behavior are to be accurately understood, the environment must be considered because they are intimately connected.

Although ecological theory traditionally is used to understand the individual's development, ecological theory has been used by many researchers in the study of foster families (Farber & Goldstein, 1998; Hong, Algood, Chiu, & Lee, 2011; Piel, Geiger, Julien-Chinn, &

Lietz, 2017). Researchers justify the utilization of the framework for the study of families because foster families' ability to care for foster children is dependent upon their interactions with all of the systems emphasized in Bronfenbrenner's work. Utilization of ecological theory also helps clarify how to best support and understand families by organizing issues and deficits in support within Bronfenbrenner's prescribed systems. Bronfenbrenner's work provides a holistic view for understanding foster families.

This study utilizes ecological theory to understand how fostering impacts foster parents' environment and ultimately their marital relationships. Human Ecology theory provides an avenue to understand the unique environments, issues, and service deficits foster parents may experience. The following sections of this chapter highlight research regarding factors influencing foster parents' ecology in each of Bronfenbrenner's prescribed systems of Human Ecology theory.

Microsystem

The first system described in Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecology Theory is the microsystem. It is the layer closest to the individual or family. Bronfenbrenner (1977; 1994) prescribes the microsystem as activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced in the direct environment. In essence, it is the most immediate environment one inhabits and includes relationships and organizations one interacts with on a daily basis. It encompasses relationships and interpersonal interactions, and these occur within the family, school, and community organizations.

The Stress of Fostering

Although more work is required, some research is beginning to measure the impact of fostering on foster parents. Although not all the results are negative, research is proving that caring for a child who has experienced significant trauma is tenuous. Leathers, Atkins,

Spielfogel, McMeel, Wesley, and Davis (2009) conducted a qualitative study using focus groups of foster parents. The study established that foster parents experience a great deal of stress in relation to the care of their foster child, especially considering the children are wards of the state and the foster parents are not able to make major decisions regarding the children in their care. Interestingly, some research has revealed that caring for a foster child has different effects on mothers and fathers. Vanschoonlandt, Vanderfaellie, Van Holen, De Maeyer, & Robberechts (2013) used a quantitative survey technique to conclude that foster mothers caring for foster children with externalizing behaviors often associated with trauma are likely to experience higher levels of stress and less likely to use positive parenting behaviors than those parents not caring for such a child. As far as foster fathers are concerned, Storhaug & Oien's (2012) used interpretive phenomenological analysis to find that foster fathers are sometimes viewed more negatively and are left fighting traditional parenting stereotypes in addition to the challenges of caring for a foster child. Based upon the information provided, fostering has a great impact upon parents as individuals. Questions regarding whether or not that negative impact transfers to the marital relationship still need to be investigated.

Marital Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction, whether it be in the context of marriage or a dating relationship, has been extensively studied. Graham, Diebels, and Barnow (2011) evaluated many definitions of relationship satisfaction and determined the terms relationship satisfaction and marital satisfaction are at times used interchangeably. However, relationship satisfaction is a broader term that encompasses marital satisfaction. Upon reviewing many researchers' definitions of the term, it was determined relationship satisfaction encompasses one's subjective global evaluation of one's relationship. Roach, Frazier, and Bowden (1981) define marital satisfaction as an attitude of greater or lesser favorability toward one's own marital relationship. For the purpose of

this study, this definition of marital satisfaction will be utilized. Research has revealed an extensive list of influences on marital satisfaction. Some of these include gender, length of marriage, number of marriages, stressful experiences, parenthood, self-esteem, attachment, communication, and more (Mirecki, Chou, Elliott, & Schneider, 2013; Oprisan, & Cristea, 2012; Schoenfeld, Loving, Pope, Huston, & Stulhofer, 2017). This study will specifically look at how marital satisfaction is influenced by the stress of foster parenting.

Disruptions and Foster Home Stability

When foster parents discontinue their certification as foster parents it is often due to the stress of fostering described previously. This can often lead to “disruptions” which essentially entails the premature ending to a foster care placement. This is deemed to be an added trauma for a foster child. Disruptions are harmful to a foster child’s well-being; however, they are likely to happen if a foster home is unstable. A quantitative study conducted on the influences of a foster child’s health revealed that disruptions negatively impact a foster child’s mental health and spurs behavioral issues (Woods, Farineau, McWey, 2011). It is in the best interest of the foster child to have a stable placement so there is not added trauma to a foster child’s already tumultuous circumstance.

Relationship factors among foster parents have been found to catalyze stable placements for foster children. Crum (2010) conducted a study on foster parents and marital/parenting alliance, which essentially entails the mutual investment into the foster child, the respect of judgement of the other parent, and the desire to communicate with the other parent. The study found that a more positively perceived parenting alliance between the foster parents was likely to result in child placement stability and fewer disruptions. Essentially if both foster parents perceived that they both are on the same page about fostering and were respectful of each other, the foster care placement was more likely to be stable. The marital relationship of foster parents can be a key

factor in placement stability and avoiding disruptions as well. A mixed methods study done on foster families in England and Wales revealed that placements are found to be more stable when there is less stress in the marital dyad (Schofield, Beck, & Ward, 2012). Studying and improving the relationships of foster parents obviously benefits foster parents; however, this research implies that it is important for foster children as well.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem is the second layer of ecological theory. This layer is the glue to the various components of the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner (1994) described it as a system of microsystems. That is, the interaction that occurs between multiple entities in the microsystem make up the mesosystem. These entities work together and make decisions that influence the individual or family. A simple example of this would be a child's parents working with their school to promote academic success for the child.

Parenting and The Marital Relationship

The impact of traditional parenthood on the marital relationship has been thoroughly researched over time. The stress of parenting and its impact upon marital satisfaction has been proven to be negative for many years. For example, secondary data analyses, quantitative experimental research, and qualitative interview research have all revealed over time the negative impact of parenthood on the marital relationship (Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; LeMasters, 1957; Leavitt, McDaniel, Maas, & Feinberg, 2017). Furthermore, La Valley and Guerrero (2012) also studied the marital relationship in conjunction with the parent-child relationship using dyadic data and found that if both spouses had healthy attachments with each other and their child, all members were more likely to report high relationship satisfaction and less conflict in their relationships. Similarly, an experimental study conducted in Switzerland on child-related stress and marital relationship satisfaction revealed that high levels of child-related

stress among parents results in lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Zemp, Nussbeck, Cummings, & Bodenmann, 2017). Research consistently reveals parenting has a significant influence on the marital relationship. Foster parenting has remained relatively unresearched in this nature compared to traditional parenthood despite its similar, yet distinct, nature.

The Difference Between Traditional Parents and Foster Parents

Some may raise the question “how different is parenting a biological child from parenting a foster child?” Although the roles do overlap, they are distinctly different. Traditional parental duties can consist of breast feeding, housework, child care duties, and family time, (Kamp, Yavorsky, & Schoppe-Sullivan 2018). And there is transportation of children to school and extra curriculars, providing for the child financially, emotionally caring for the child, and so on. Foster parents take on these duties, likely aside from breastfeeding, along with added duties. A study done on foster parents and foster care professionals’ expectations of responsibilities of foster parenthood include not only traditional parenting tasks but also the recruitment of new foster parents, working with birth families of foster children, arranging specialized resources for foster children, forming a secure parent-child relationship, helping children adjust to foster care, obtaining and maintaining records on the child, and working with foster care agencies (Rhodes, Orme, & McSurdy, 2003).

One study had 26 foster parents log their time spent caring for their foster children and found that foster parents commonly spend their time in contact with children’s birth families, in medical appointments for the child, in educational meetings regarding the child, in meetings regarding the placement of the child in foster care, facilitating respite services, and acting as a liaison for the child and their school regarding behavioral issues (Forbes, O’Neill, Humphreys, Tregeagle, & Cox, 2011). The study ultimately found that foster parents spend an average of more than six more hours a week caring for a foster child compared to a child not in foster care.

To add to the intensity of a foster parent's role, many professionals working with foster parents have differing expectations of foster parents' responsibilities, which can lead to confusion and feeling overwhelmed (Rhodes, Orme, & McSurdy, 2003). Although traditional parenthood is not easy, foster parents have more responsibilities than a traditional parent likely has, which means added stress.

Some may also pose the idea that if traditional parenthood affects the marital relationship, foster parenthood affects the marital relationship as well. This could be true, but it could also be argued that foster parents could have uniquely strong relationships. Before a couple can become certified foster parents, couples have to go through thorough assessment of all their significant relationships and have references given that address the couple's marriage. It could be that the process of foster parent certification weeds out those that have struggling relationships; therefore, those parents that become certified are a population of married individuals in quite healthy relationships that are less susceptible to marital impact. That would certainly be the intent of assessing the foster parents' relationship as a part of the certification process. Nevertheless, the unique stress foster parents experience as they proceed through their fostering journey could likely be harming marital satisfaction.

Foster Parenting and The Marital Relationship

Some have expressed discontent with the lack of attention to foster families in research (Lietz, Julien-Chinn, Geiger, & Piel, 2016). Some believe there is not enough research on foster families to reveal foster family characteristics and the unique circumstances they encounter. Foster parents play an essential part in the child welfare system that seeks to provide care for children whose own parents are unable to provide care. Foster parents face daunting challenges such as the mental health state of the children they care for, emotional stress that both foster parents and foster children experience, and increased responsibilities required of foster parents

by the child welfare system. These challenges are compounded with the typical responsibilities expected of any parent.

Despite the many unknowns about the impact of fostering on foster parents' marital relationship, research has revealed some information regarding the issue. For example, through narrative interviews, a study revealed that resilient foster parents typically exhibit some common strengths including connectedness and effective communication (Lietz, Julien-Chinn, Geiger, & Piel, 2016). These strengths are also integral in a healthy marriage. In addition, a study done using open ended phone interviews in the Mid-Atlantic found that approximately 67% of foster parents in the Mid-Atlantic were married (Ahnn et al., 2017). The same study found that of the non-married foster parents, the median duration of fostering was 192 months in comparison 84 months for those who were married. This study suggests a turnover amongst married foster parents in the Mid-Atlantic; however, more research needs to be done to establish a definitive relationship between the state of parents' marriage and fostering duration. Unfortunately, similar information specific to Oklahoma or the United States as a whole has not been located despite concerted efforts.

Exosystem

The exosystem is described as the interactions that occur in one's ecology that are distant to the individual or family. The individual or family is not directly affected by events occurring in the exosystem but their immediate setting is influenced. An example of how this could occur for foster families could be changes in state policy regarding foster care. The interactions that may occur and result in changes in policy did not involve the individual or foster family; however, they indirectly influence the family.

The Foster Care System Dynamics

Although the foster care system has certainly improved over the decades, it is a

commonly shared opinion that there is still much to be improved upon in the United States' child welfare system. Improvement can be afforded at all levels of implementation and especially at policy formation and implementation. Although the dynamics of the child welfare system do influence foster parents, they are something that foster parents do not have a lot of influence in. Much of the dynamics of the foster care system are a result of the policy and implementation of the child welfare system.

Worker Turnover

For example, child welfare worker turnover has been a concern. It is an issue that has been extensively researched; however, turnover continues to be an issue in the child welfare system. One study found that foster parents have concerns, but little influence on child welfare workers' lack of resources, time, and support to do their job effectively, which can eventually result in turnover (Geiger, Piel, & Julien-Chinn, 2017). When turnover occurs, it causes hardship on the foster child and foster parents. There is often very little transition from one worker to another which results in stalled case progression and uniformed decisions being made on a case (Geiger, Piel, Julien-Chinn, 2017). When turnover among case workers happens, it can be difficult for foster parents to know who to contact about their child's case, to help form a new relationship between the worker and the foster child, and to get the case worker up to speed on the child's case. Turnover of case workers can be stressful for both the child and foster parents.

Worker-Foster Parent Dynamics

Focus groups done by Hollin and Larkin (2014) revealed some interesting dynamics of the child welfare system. Focus group discussion revealed that the case worker and child are seen as team mates in the foster care process, but the foster parents are viewed to have a non-parental role. Furthermore, the study found social workers tend to have a negative perspective of foster parents, if they attempt to act in a parental way with the foster child. The perspectives revealed

about foster care roles are concerning given that research does reveal that parental qualities such as bonding, relating, and connecting are important in a successful foster care placement (Oke, Rostill-Brookes, & Larkin, 2013). Foster parents being hesitant to act as a parent to a foster child which could lead to a more stressful placement and a possible disruption of placement.

Foster Child Sibling Relationships

Another key piece to the foster care system dynamics is the emphasis put on the sibling relationship between foster children. Many states have policies enforcing the placement of siblings together when in the best interest of the child. Although the research on sibling relationships in foster care is lacking, we do know that sibling relationships are important when a child is facing parental issues, a non-harmonious home environment, maltreatment, and out-of-home care (Schlonsky, Bellamy, Elkins, & Ashare, 2005; Sheehan, Darlington, Noller, & Feeney, 2008). Although a child being placed with a sibling is certainly important, it can place some stress and grief upon foster parents. For example, if a foster home that can care for an entire sibling group is not located initially and a sibling group is separated, there is the possibility that a home that can care for all of the siblings could be located later on in the childrens' time in the system. This could result in the removal of each sibling from their initial foster home placement so that all siblings could be placed together. This can be stressful for both foster parents and foster children if there is an attachment formed between the parents and the child.

Foster Parent Stipend

Finally, Foster parents typically receive a stipend to cover the cost of caring for a foster child. The stipend amount is usually determined by formal methodology and varies among states, the age of the child being cared for, the number of foster children being cared for, and the level of care the foster child needs (Davooight & Dennis, 2013). Unfortunately, the stipend is sometimes not enough to cover the costs of caring for the child, which can place financial strains

on foster parents. A study by Pac (2017) found that payments are considered a cause for placement disruption; however, additional findings suggest a one percent increase in stipend payment could decrease the likelihood of placement disruption by twenty-seven percent. Essentially the financial assistance received by the child welfare system has a notable influence in placement stability. Finances are of great importance in any family's life; however, they become even more worrisome when taking in a foster child. Foster parents do not have a say in the amount of their stipend, and it is sometimes not enough. This places financial stress on the foster family.

Services Available to Foster Parents

There are a number of supports available to foster parents that are provided by communities and government agencies. Services provided by the Department of Human Service can include child care stipends, respite services, liability insurance, pre-service and in-service training, hotline assistance, foster parent associations and support groups, and newsletters (Oklahoma Department of Human Services, 2019b). Additional services commonly available to foster parents are private foster care agency support, ministry groups for foster and adoptive families, and government financial assistance. There are no evident supports specifically geared toward the marital health of foster parents. Despite the services available to foster parents, much research shows that foster parents have limited training, feel unsupported, and have low self-efficacy (Hannah & Woolgar, 2018; Sinclair, Gibbs, & Wilson, 2004). Although services exist for foster parents, not all of the needs are being met and there is certainly a need for more evidence-based services for foster parents.

It should be noted that the dynamics within the child welfare system in the United States are ever changing as new policies are put into place and more research is conducted. Dynamics also differ substantially from state to state because policies and social culture differ among

states. This point is made to explain that it would be impossible to account for all of the factors that influence the dynamics of the child welfare system. The factors explained above were included because they are common themes in research and do not necessarily cover all influences of child welfare dynamics.

Macrosystem

The next layer, the macrosystem, consists of the beliefs, values, knowledge, customs, and life styles. These are characteristic of the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner 1979). For a foster family, this would include the economic, political, and social climate of the community in which they reside.

Foster Parent Stereotypes

Research on foster parents shows that many foster parents feel stigmatized in their role as a foster parent. Specifically, research has found many foster parents feel stigmatized by the media, agency personnel, and other parents (Rosenwald & Bronstein, 2008; Sheldon, 2002). The feeling of stigmatization can make foster parents feel as though they are isolated, do not have power in their fostering journey, and that their efforts as foster parents are not valued (Gilbertson & Barber, 2003; Rosenwald & Bronstein, 2008; Wilson, Sinclair, & Gibbs, 2000). Essentially the stress that couples experience as foster parents can feel discounted.

Parenting Strategies

The children being cared for by foster parents have experienced significant trauma. Foster children often display dysfunctional behaviors and difficulty developing healthy relationships as a result of the trauma they have experienced; furthermore, these behaviors intensify throughout the child's lifetime if they are left unaddressed (Verhulst, 2000). Because the behavioral issues foster children display are a result of trauma, traditional parenting practices are usually ineffective in combating the behavioral issues of the child (Razuri et al., 2016). In

essence the way one parents a child from trauma is different from parenting a child without significant trauma in their past.

Foster parents that implore more traditional parenting strategies with a foster child that are characteristic of the culture in the United States may exacerbate the maladaptive behaviors associated with trauma (Crum, 2010). As more research is being done on trauma and working with foster children through a trauma-informed lens, foster parents are becoming more educated on how to parent foster children (Purvis, Cross, Dansereau, & Parris, 2013; Razuri et al., 2016) As behaviors escalate as a result of more traditional parenting practices, the stress level of the foster parents likely increases.

Foster Parents in Oklahoma

According to the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Summary Data (2018a), there were a total of 4,297 foster homes in Oklahoma. The same data report noted that there was a total of 8,610 children in out of home care in 2018. Just because there were 4,297 homes licensed with DHS, does not mean that all of them were open for taking child placements. These numbers reveal there is a great need for foster parents in Oklahoma and that the state cannot afford the turnover that occurs for foster parents like that of the Mid-Atlantic region. Investigation needs to be conducted on the potential correlation between fostering and the marital relationship in order to prevent turnover amongst married foster parents in Oklahoma and beyond.

Chronosystem

Finally, the chronosystem embodies the events throughout the life span that affect the individual/family unit and the environment they exist in. This allows for the understanding of changes and the impact they have throughout time (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Foster Child Trauma

Foster children have experienced more hardship in their lives than a typical child

considering most children are introduced to the foster system as a result of abuse and/or neglect. On top of the trauma they experienced while in the care of their own parent or guardian, a foster child experiences the trauma of being taken in by the child welfare system and placed in a home they are most likely unfamiliar with. A large portion of foster children experience multiple placements while in the foster system, which means added trauma. For example, of the 9,938 children in the Oklahoma foster care system during 2016, 4,615 children had experienced more than two placements (The Annie E. Casey Foundation: Kids Count Data Center). Unfortunately, the trauma children experience through abuse, neglect, and placements in the foster care system have negative impacts upon them.

Research regarding the impact of the trauma foster children experience is extensive. A meta-analysis on the psychological adjustment of children in foster care done by Jones & Morris (2012), concluded overall that the circumstances a child's experiences before and during placement can impact a child in ways such as increased aggression, delinquent behavior, and mental illness (2012). Based upon the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, The Center for Disease Control concluded that the trauma foster children experience can lead to substance abuse, inability to form close relationships, psychiatric disorders, chronic disease, homelessness, suicide, and more (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, 2016). Based upon the secondary data analysis of the Wisconsin school system administrative data, children in out of home care are also found to be more likely to have poor performance in school, which is often due to cognitive issues many foster children experience (Berger, Cancian, Han, Noyes, & Rios-Salas, 2015). Taking on responsibility for the care of a child with these experiences is not an easy task given the history children in the child welfare system often have.

Child Welfare systems and other service providers that serve foster children have begun

to adopt the trauma informed system of care, which involves recognizing symptoms of trauma and responding in a manner that is individualized to the child that has experienced the trauma. Results of research on the effectiveness of the system are promising. The study done by Murphy, Moore, Redd, and Malm, which utilized secondary data analysis of Kansas Child Welfare System's data revealed that children experiencing trauma informed care improved functioning, emotional regulation, and behavioral regulation (2017). Even though the effects of trauma on foster children are beginning to be addressed, caring for foster children who have experienced extensive trauma is extremely difficult.

Compassion Fatigue as a Result of Foster Child Trauma

Compassion Fatigue is a term used to describe the emotional effects felt as a result of working with individuals who have experienced trauma, especially for long term periods of time (Figley, 2002, 2013). Compassion fatigue presence has been established in a number of fields working with foster youth including trauma counselors, forensic interviewers, domestic violence staff, and social workers (Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Carmel & Friedlander, 2009; Perron, & Hiltz, 2006; Sprang, Craig, & Clark, 2011) The foster children that foster parents care for have often experienced various forms of trauma including abuse, neglect, home instability, etc. While a child is being cared for in a foster home, the harm the foster children have experienced comes to light. Both Ottaway & Selwyn (2016) and Hannah & Woolgar (2018) found high prevalence of compassion fatigue among foster parents. Many of those found to have compassion fatigue in both studies were found to specifically exhibit secondary trauma, which presents similarly to post-traumatic stress disorder. Research has shown that compassion fatigue does not exist in isolation. Negash and Sahin (2011) have shown that compassion fatigue spills over into one's personal life; therefore, it seems likely that the compassion fatigue foster parents may experience could spill over into their marital relationship.

The Retraumatization of Foster Parents

Retraumatization refers to the reaction that occurs as a result of exposure to a traumatic event or a situation that mirrors a previously experienced traumatic event (Duckworth & Follette, 2012; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014a). For a foster parent, retraumatization could occur if a parent has previously experienced similar traumatic events to the foster child in their care. Retraumatization has the potential to create suffering for one or both foster parents that could lead to the placement disruption of the foster child or even the closure of the foster family's home. In essence, the trauma that a foster parent may or may not have experienced in their past has the potential to resurface in the fostering process, which can harm the well-being of the fostering process.

Summary

In summary, there are many factors and stressors that have the potential to impact the marital satisfaction of foster parents. These have been explained and organized within the five systems of Urie Bronfenbrenner's human ecology model. Many of the factors such as foster child trauma could be viewed under the lens of multiple ecological model systems; however, for the purpose of this literature review, each factor was carefully considered and categorized within the system that most fully fit the factor being discussed in light of this study's topic. For example, foster child trauma could be categorized in the exosystem because the trauma is a result of interactions that occurred distant from the foster family. The foster family was not directly affected by the trauma that occurred; however, the foster family's setting was influenced once the child entered the foster family's home. It also characterizes the chronosystem because the impact of the child's trauma has effects on the child and the foster family throughout time, which is why foster child trauma was ultimately categorized among the chronosystem. All in all, this

literature review sought to explain variables in foster parenting that can influence the marital satisfaction of foster parents.

The Approach of this Study

The impact of fostering on the marital relationship is somewhat under researched; however, there is research on factors that influence the problem such as the impact of traditional parenthood on the marital relationship, foster child trauma, the stress of foster parenting, as well as causes of foster home disruptions instability. Based upon research on these subjects, there is reasonable justification to investigate the impact of fostering on the marital relationship. Furthermore, the research associated with the subject has utilized a wide variety of research methods and approaches. Therefore, it justifies the use of a mixed methods approach to investigating the impact of fostering on the marital relationship of foster parents.

Research Questions

Research regarding foster children is somewhat extensive; however, research regarding foster parents is less common. There have been few studies looking at the marital relationship of foster parents and even fewer looking at the relationship between foster parenting and foster parents' quality of marriage. It is imperative that this relationship be studied. If there is a negative correlation between the two factors, key issues in foster parenting such as burnout and retention of foster parents in the child welfare system could be found to be associated with the issue.

RQ 1: How satisfied are Oklahoma foster parents in their marital relationship?

RQ 2: To what extent do Oklahoma foster parents experience stress related to foster parenting?

RQ 3: How do Oklahoma foster parents perceive aspects of fostering to have impacted their marital relationship?

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study investigated the impact of foster parenting on the marital relationship of foster parents through online survey research. Specifically, the study looked at any relationship between the marital satisfaction of foster parents and the stresses of foster parenting. The research also specifically examined how foster parents perceive fostering to impact their marital relationship. It was anticipated that foster parenting would have a negative impact on foster parents' marital relationships. In order to achieve the objectives of this research study, an online survey was used for data collection. The survey utilized a concurrent embedded approach and was distributed amongst online social media support groups for foster parents.

The Method of this Study

This research project utilized a mixed methods approach. It specifically used a concurrent-embedded approach, which is considered a mixed method because it encompasses aspects of both qualitative and quantitative methods. In order to explain the advantages of using a mixed method approach for this study, the benefits and limitations of both quantitative and qualitative research will be discussed. Following the discussion of both quantitative and qualitative research, mixed methods research will be discussed in addition to the specific mixed-methods approach this study utilized.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research had its beginnings with social scientists and anthropologists and proved to be beneficial for these disciplines because of its ability to clarify how people assign meaning to their experiences. It provided deeper understanding of experiences and their meaning than quantitative research would allow. Van Manaan (1979) defines qualitative research by stating it is "an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of

certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.” (p. 520). Essentially qualitative research goes beyond the quantification of an experience and instead provides an in-depth description of experiences and occurrences.

Qualitative research often begins with a topic or question that is most often answered by means of interviews, observations, and document analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). No matter the means of data gathering, the research is dependent upon the researcher and how they collect and analyze the data (Patten, 2002). Conclusions are then drawn from these data collection methods. More specifically, Qualitative research utilizes inductive reasoning in that conclusions are drawn from specific instances (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These inductive conclusions hopefully answer to the topic or question the research project started with.

Although qualitative research does provide in-depth understanding of phenomena, it does have limitations. The sample sizes of qualitative studies tend to be smaller, which results in the findings being unrepresentative of the population being studied (Harry & Lipsky, 2014). When a qualitative study does have a somewhat larger population, conducting and analyzing data collection can be very time consuming. This brings up the next limitation being the difficulty analyzing qualitative data. The process of analyzing and conducting qualitative research is complicated and elusive in nature (Richards & Richards, 2014). Finally, the results on qualitative studies cannot be generalized due to the utilization of non-probability sampling and the specificity to individual experiences (Rahman, 2016). All in all, qualitative research does provide deep insight into experience, but it is limited by its limited sampling, time consumption, complicated dissemination and analysis, and its limited generalizability.

Quantitative Research

Quantitative research contrasts to qualitative research considerably. Quantitative research seeks to answer a research problem by means of collecting numerical data rather than utilizing

words as the primary source of data, as qualitative research does. It seeks to answer questions by determining how many, how much, or to what extent (Rasinger, 2013). This is most often achieved by some primary methods. These include surveys, online questionnaires, or polls (Patten, 2002). Statistical analysis is used to assess the data obtained by these methods and, ultimately, confirm or disconfirm a hypothesis. In contrast to qualitative research, quantitative methods draw conclusions deductively in that the process is started with a general hypothesis and then conclusions are drawn based upon the results of the data obtained. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Quantitative research has many advantages, one of them being that it is typically less time consuming than qualitative research (Connolly, 2007). In addition to being less time consuming, quantitative research findings can be more appropriately generalized to a whole population. Carr (1994) states that quantitative findings are more generalizable because it usually utilizes random sampling, meaning it is more representative of a population. Carr (1994) also mentions that quantitative research samples can be much larger due to the method being less time consuming; therefore, the larger sample makes the results more reliable. Overall, quantitative research poses many benefits.

Although quantitative research does prove its value in research, it is not without its flaws. Although quantitative research can yield results that are generalizable, the method fails to ascertain meaning and a deeper understanding of the results that are obtained (Rahman, 2016). Another weakness of quantitative research is it does determine the “what” of a research problem but it tends to not answer the “how” of a research problem. In other words, Blaiki (2007) stated that quantitative research cannot account for how reality is shaped, maintained, or interpreted. Finally, because quantitative research is highly systematic and controlled, it tends to be highly objective (Rahman, 2016). Essentially, quantitative research lacks connection between the

researcher and the participant.

Mixed Method Research

Mixed methods research embraces aspects of both qualitative and quantitative research. Creswell (2015) describes mixed methods research as:

An approach to research in the social, behavioral, and health sciences in which the investigator gathers both quantitative (closed ended) and qualitative (open ended) data, integrates the two and then draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data to understand research problems (p.2). Many researchers argue that both qualitative and quantitative components can be married together to produce a fuller understanding of a subject.

Mixed methods research began in the late 1960's; however, the method has been debated for many years. On one side of the debate are purists who believe that qualitative and quantitative research have incompatible epistemological underpinnings. On the other side of the debate are the pragmatists who believe that multiple paradigms can be used to answer research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Although there is still some debate over mixed methods as a viable research approach, today it is mostly accepted as a methodology (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This project embraces mixed-methods as a viable approach, which gains multiple lines of sight in a research project. Utilizing aspects of both qualitative and quantitative research provides a fuller and more precise picture in answering a research question.

There are three main types of mixed methods research. The first, concurrent design, is used by simultaneously deploying both qualitative and quantitative design simultaneously and results are compared (Creswell & Zhang, 2009). The explanatory sequential design is used when quantitative data is collected first and then qualitative data is collected in efforts to explain the results or particular facets of the initial quantitative data (Creswell, 2015). Finally, the exploratory design is seemingly the opposite of the explanatory design in that the qualitative data

collection is done first in order to gain knowledge on a subject before creating and deploying a quantitative survey (Creswell, 2015). All in all each type of mixed methods research is used to achieve something slightly different; however, each type provides a fuller picture when answering a research question.

Concurrent Embedded Approach

This research project utilizes a specific type of concurrent mixed methods design, which is known as the concurrent embedded approach. The concurrent approach occurs by collecting both the qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously (Creswell & Zhang, 2009). The Concurrent embedded approach occurs when both qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously and either the qualitative or quantitative data method is included within the priority data collection method (either qualitative or quantitative). The qualitative and quantitative pieces of the research instrument are usually used to answer separate aspects of the research question. The integration of the data from the qualitative and quantitative pieces occurs in the data analysis stage (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). Ultimately this type of research design is useful in getting a broader picture in answering a research question.

For this purpose of this research project, the concurrent embedded design manifested as a quantitative priority online survey. In other words, the research instrument was primarily a quantitative survey. Furthermore, the quantitative survey had three open-ended items embedded at the end of the survey. The quantitative items were used to measure marital satisfaction and stress in addition to demographic information. The three embedded qualitative items were used as a way to tie stress related to fostering together with perceptions of marital satisfaction. This was done by essentially asking how aspects of foster parenting have impacted the participant's marital relationship. The results of both the qualitative and quantitative items in the survey were

analyzed separately; however, the results were integrated by comparing and contrasting the responses from both the qualitative and quantitative data in order to draw overall conclusions from the data. Overall the quantitative portion of the concurrent embedded design was used to answer research question one and research question two. The embedded qualitative items were used to answer research question three.

Instrument

The instrument used for the project was a twenty-eight item concurrent embedded online survey that was expected to take participants ten minutes to complete (see Appendix F). The original instrument was twenty-seven items; however, upon recommendation of the thesis committee, the two open-ended items were revised and an additional open-ended item was included (See appendix E and F). After the recommended revisions, the final product was a twenty-eight item self-report survey.

Informed Consent

The first item in the instrument was the informed consent of the research participants (See appendix D). The item outlined the project title, the researcher, project purpose, procedures, expected length of participation, potential benefits, potential discomforts, contact information of the researcher, UCO IRB contact information, explanation of confidentiality and privacy, and assurance of voluntary participation. The participants were instructed to select “yes” if they voluntarily agreed to participate, understood there was no penalty to not participate, understood they could withdraw from participation at any time, and acknowledged they were at least eighteen years old. Participants were instructed to select “no” if they did not agree to the stipulations. If a subject selected “no,” the survey was automatically ended. Of the seventy-two survey responses received for this project, two subjects selected “no” on the informed consent item; therefore, they were not included in the analysis of data.

Demographic Information

Items two through sixteen of the survey addressed the demographic information of the participants. Specifically, items two through ten addressed basic demographic information including age, Oklahoma county of residence, sex, marital status, length of marriage, race/ethnicity, yearly household income, education level, and religious preference. It should be noted that religious preference was measured because religious individuals tend to be more satisfied in their marriages; therefore, it was thought to be important to measure this influencing factor (Olson, Marshall, Goddard, & Schramm, 2015; Rose, Anderson, Miller, Marks, Hatch, Card, 2018). Also worthy of noting is the fact that two participants indicated they were divorced; therefore, they were not presently in a marital relationship. Six participants indicated they were single; therefore, they were also excluded from analysis.

Because of the topic of this project, it was important to measure more specific demographic information related specifically to foster parenting. Items eleven through sixteen addressed whether or not the participant had a foster placement currently residing in their home, if the participant had a foster placement residing in their home within the last six months, and if the participant had a foster placement residing in their home within the past three months. Participants were also asked to indicate the age and sex of each biological child they have, the age and sex of each foster child currently placed in their home, and the age and sex of each foster child placed in their home within the past six months but is no longer placed in their home. This information provides a picture of the age and number of children in the participant's home, the relationship the participant has to the child(ren), and the duration of the relationship the participant has with the child(ren). A greater number of foster children in the home could potentially indicate increased levels of stress. Also, whether or not the participant had foster

placements close to or at the time they completed the survey, could affect how the participant reports their perceptions of experienced stress and perceptions of their marital relationship.

Foster Parent Stress

Foster parent stress was measured by five items. The first item was a pre-existing instrument developed by Elo Leppänen, & Jahkola (2003). Elo and Joahkola developed the single item measure of stress symptoms to monitor stress in various contexts. Validity testing has revealed the item is a valid measure for well-being (Elo, Leppänen, & Jahkola, 2003). The remaining four items were developed by the primary investigator for this project. These items addressed the amount of stress the participant has experienced in relation to foster parenting, the amount of emotional distress the participant has experienced in relation to a foster child's past and associated behavioral problems, the amount of stress the participant believes their spouse has experienced in relation to fostering, and the amount of emotional distress the participant believes their spouse has experienced in relation to a foster child's past and associated behavioral problems. These four items sought to address the stress the participant experiences in addition to specifically accounting for the foster children's experienced trauma and behavior, which was extensively discussed in the literature review chapter. Finally, the last two items regarding how the participant perceives their spouse's experiences bring a unique perspective to the data.

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction was measured by utilizing an already existing four-item relationship satisfaction scale, the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI). The scale, developed by Funk & Rogge (2007), was created out of concern that commonly used relationship satisfaction scales such as the MAT or the DAS have concerningly high measurement error (Funk & Rogge, 2007). The CSI is commonly used in online studies and has been found to be much more precise as well as have a much lower measurement error in comparison to other commonly used relationship

satisfaction measurements (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Overall the CSI was selected for its precision, validity, and conciseness.

Perceptions of How Foster Parenting Impact Marital Satisfaction

Finally, three open ended items were utilized to gauge how participants perceive aspects of foster parenting to have impacted their marriage. The three questions were developed by the primary investigator in partnership with the thesis committee. Initially there were two open-ended items that were phrased “How do you believe foster parenting has impacted your marriage?” and “Are there any services that do not exist, or you are not aware of, that you believe would help in the maintenance of your marital relationship while fostering?” After discussion with the thesis committee it was evident the first open-ended item was too broad, and the second item was beyond the scope of the research project.

Due to reasons discussed above, the second open-ended item was omitted during the revision process. The first open-ended item was expanded upon and made more specific by breaking it up into three separate open-ended items. The final open-ended items were phrased “How do you believe foster parenting has impacted your marriage”, “What aspects of foster parenting have been challenging for you?”, and “What aspects of foster parenting have been rewarding for you?” It is believed that the first item provides an opportunity for the researcher to understand how fostering impact’s the marital relationship of the participants’. The final two open-ended items inform the first open-ended item by providing more insight into what factors could be influencing the participant’s experience fostering and their marital relationship.

Participants

Participants for this study were selected by convenience sampling. To initiate study participant recruitment, a social media post containing the survey link was made in three separate Facebook groups for foster parents. Foster parents were able to click on the survey link to

complete the survey and they were also able to share the survey link with other foster parents if they chose to do so. Two follow-up posts were made in each Facebook group in an attempt to gain more participants. The survey was limited to foster parents in Oklahoma due to child welfare systems operating differently in each state. Limiting the sample to Oklahoma foster parents minimized outside variables associated with other states' foster care systems. All foster parents that were included in the analysis were certified foster parents in the state of Oklahoma.

Procedures

Before beginning data collection, ethical protocols prescribed by the University of Central Oklahoma Institutional Review Board were abided by. Both the Committee Chair and I completed the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) training, which is required as part of the IRB process prescribed by the University of Central Oklahoma Institutional Review Board. An IRB application was submitted and given expedited approval in July of 2019 (IRB #2019-110-UCO E). A proposal was also given to the thesis committee for this project, which outlined the scope of the project and its contributions to research. The thesis committee consisted of four University of Central Oklahoma faculty members with experience with the social sciences, qualitative research, and quantitative research. After IRB and committee approval, data collection began.

To begin data collection, an initial post containing an anonymous Qualtrics survey link was made in two Facebook groups created for Oklahoma foster parents. Following the initial posts, the survey instrument was reposted twice. The first repost was made one week after the initial post. The second repost was made two weeks after the initial post. In an effort to obtain additional responses, a third foster parent Facebook page was utilized for data collection. After the initial post was made in the third Facebook group, a repost was made one week after the initial post and again two weeks after the initial post. When completing the survey posted in each

of the Facebook groups, each participant gave consent digitally before beginning the main portion of the survey and participation was completely voluntary. The survey took approximately thirteen minutes for participants to complete. After the inclusion of the third social media group, a total of seventy-six responses were obtained. All response data was stored on locked computers.

Analysis

Upon the completion of data collection, analysis was commenced by using a combination of content analysis, descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis. SPSS was utilized for the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis (IBM Corp., 2016). Basic descriptive statistics were used to measure the demographic information. The analysis to answer research question one, the perceived marital satisfaction of participants, was done by running descriptive statistics for each individual item of the four-item Couples Satisfaction Index. The overall mean score and standard deviation for each of the four items are reported in the results section.

For research question two, regarding the stress related to foster parenting, a new variable was created that computed the overall score of the 4-item Couples Satisfaction Index. Once the new variable was created, correlational analysis between the Couples Satisfaction Index variable; the one-item stress symptom measure; the item stating *I have experienced a considerable amount of stress as a foster parent*; the item stating *I have experienced a considerable amount of emotional distress in relation to a foster child's past and/or any associated behavioral problems*; the item stating *My spouse has experienced a considerable amount of stress as a foster parent*; and the item *My spouse has experienced a considerable amount of emotional distress in relation to a foster child's past and/or any associated behavioral problems*. The significant correlation results are reported in the results section.

Finally, the first two open-ended items related to research question three, regarding how participants viewed foster parenting to have impacted their marital relationship, were analyzed using content analysis. Initial codes were given, the initial codes were broadened into categories, and then the categories were refined into themes. Phrases were selected as the meaning unit for the coding process. Some responses included multiple phrases; therefore, some responses included multiple codes. The third open-ended item was only coded once and not refined into categories and themes. This was done because of the diversity of responses. The primary investigator and members of the research committee agreed that refining the codes further would dilute the data and cause for important information to be generalized too far. All codes for the open-ended responses are reported in the results section.

Chapter Four: Results

A total of seventy-six responses were obtained during survey data collection; however, not every respondent fully completed the survey. It should be noted that six respondents reported they were single (n=6). These respondents were excluded from analysis because the study was specifically looking at how foster parenting impacts the marital relationship. This left seventy responses for analysis. A total of forty-eight respondents completed the three open ended items. It should be noted that some respondents did answer the open-ended items but did not explain their answers. These responses were still considered in analysis because, although not explained, the response does contribute to the full picture of how fostering has impacted the respondent's marriage. Six respondents did not explain their response on item twenty-six, three respondents did not explain their response to item twenty-seven, and sixteen respondents did not explain their response to item twenty-eight.

Description of Participants

The ages of respondents ranged from twenty-two years to fifty-seven years with a mean age of 37 years-old. Thirty-eight years was reported most often for respondent age (n=6). All participants resided in Oklahoma. Distribution of participants by county can be found in Table 1. The respondents of this study were primarily female (n=62). Two participants reported being male, six respondents elected to not disclose their sex, and no participants selected "Other" as their sex.

All participants have been married at some point. The majority of participants simply reported they were married (n=60). Two participants reported being divorced, one reported being remarried, one reported being separated, and six did not indicate their marital status. Marriage length ranged from one year (n=4) to thirty-seven years (n=1). The mean length of marriage was 10.87 years. Being married five years was reported most often (n=8).

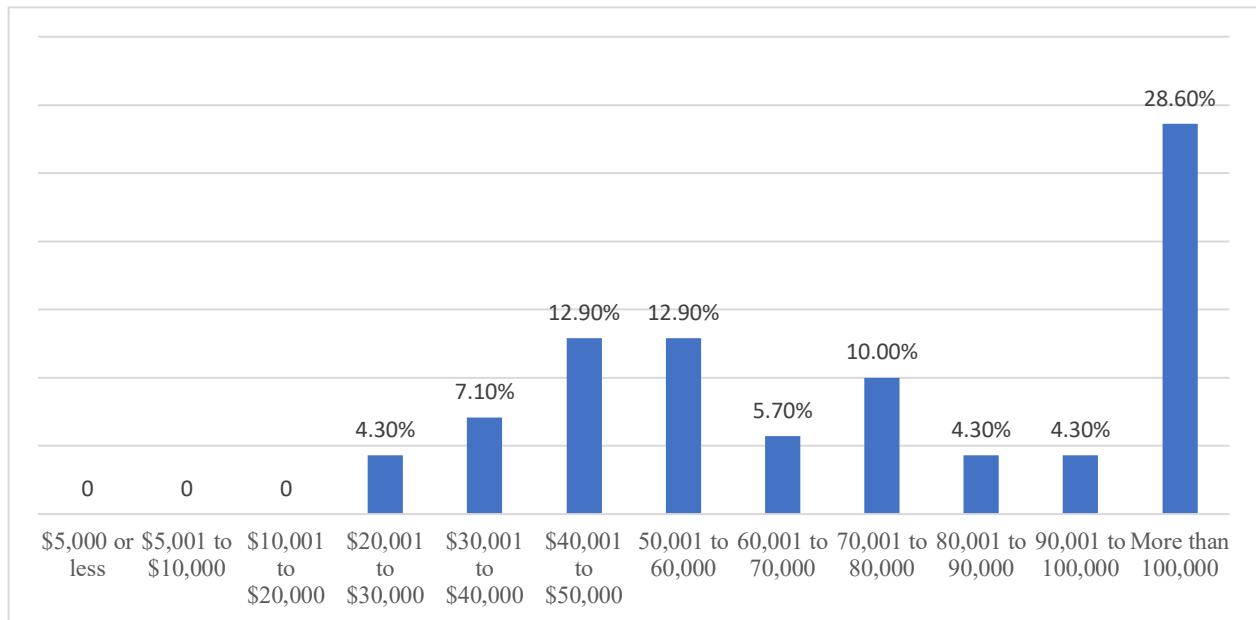
All participants reported being either Native American/Alaskan Native (n=3) or White/Caucasian (n=61). Six did not report their race/ethnicity. Income ranged from “between \$20,001 to \$30,000 per year” and “More than \$100,000 per year.” An income of more than \$100,000 per year was most frequently reported (n=20) (see Figure 1). The mean income was found to be between \$60,001 and \$70,000. Education ranged from “High School graduate or GED equivalent” to “Post graduate degree (master’s degree, doctorate degree, etc.)” Five participants reported “High School graduate or GED equivalent,” two reported “Trade/Technical/Vocational schooling,” twenty-two reported “Some college,” twenty-four “College graduate,” two reported “Some graduate schooling,” and nine reported “Post graduate degree (master’s degree, doctorate degree, etc.) (see Figure 2).

Table 1*County of Participants' Primary Residence*

County	Frequency
<i>Beckham</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Canadian</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Carter</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Cherokee</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Cleveland</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Adair</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Comanche</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Creek</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Custer</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Delaware</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Dewey</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Garvin</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Grady</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Hughes</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Johnston</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Logan</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>McClain</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Major</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Mayes</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Oklahoma</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Pawnee</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Payne</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Pontotoc</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Pottawatomie</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Rogers</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Tulsa</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Wagoner</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>64</i>

Figure 1

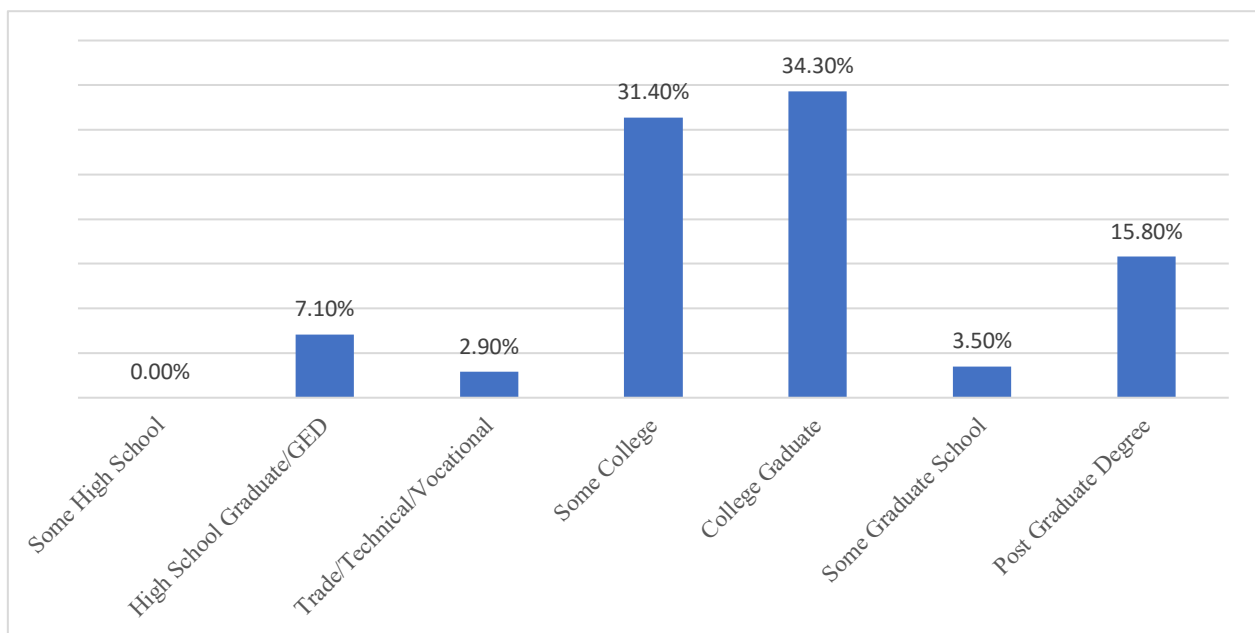
Yearly Household Income of Respondents



This figure illustrates the income distribution of the study participants (n=70).

Figure 2

Educational Level of Respondents

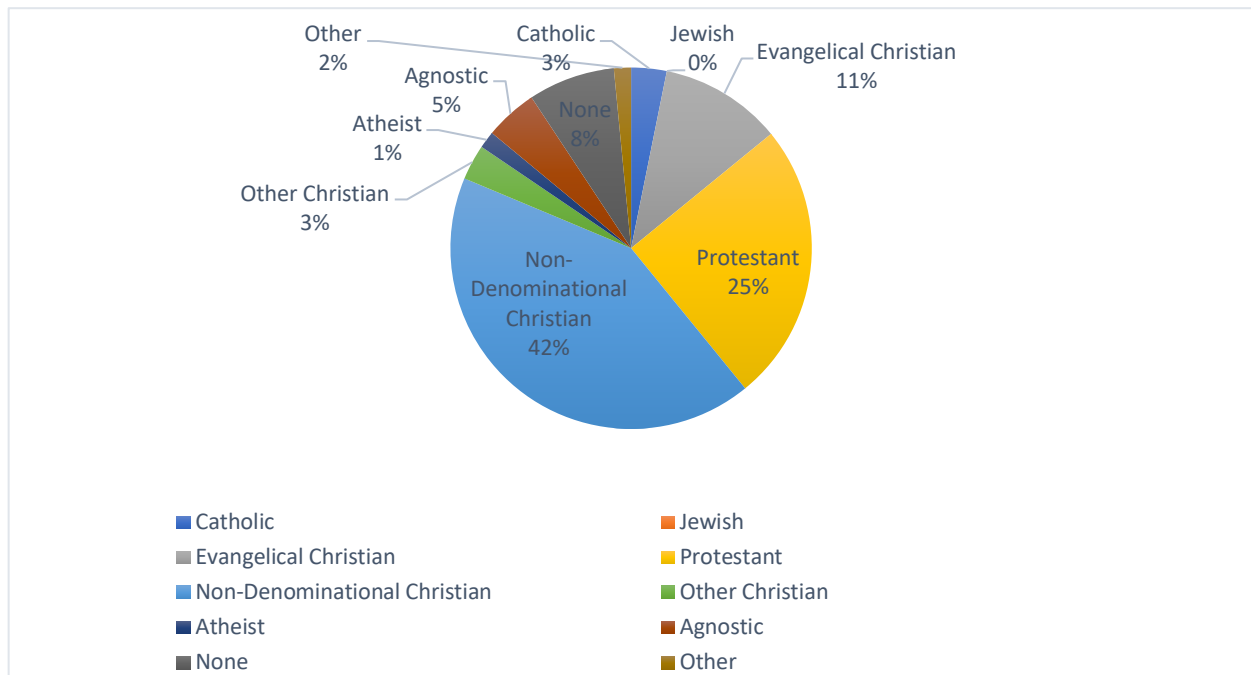


This figure illustrates the highest level of education respondents obtained (n=70)

As far as religious preference is concerned, Non-denominational Christian was reported most often (n=27). Catholic was reported by two participants, Evangelical Christian was reported by seven participants, Protestant was reported by sixteen participants, “Other Christian (e.g. Apostolic, LDS or Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness)” was reported twice, Atheist was reported once, Agnostic was reported by three participants, and “None” was reported by five participants, and “Other” was reported by one participant. Six participants did not report their religious preference (see Figure 3). The demographic information of the children in the participants’ homes are described in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4.

Figure 3

Religious Preference of Respondents



This figure illustrates the religious preference of the study respondents (n=57).

Table 2*Ages and Genders of Foster Parents' Biological Children*

Age of Child	Male	Female	Total
Less than 1 year	1	0	1
1 year old	3	1	4
2 years old	3	0	3
3 years old	5	2	7
4 years old	1	2	3
5 years old	1	3	4
6 years old	2	1	3
7 years old	2	1	3
8 years old	3	2	5
9 years old	1	1	2
10 years old	1	2	3
11 years old	4	2	6
12 years old	3	3	6
13 years old	0	2	2
14 years old	0	3	3
15 years old	4	5	9
16 years old	2	1	3
17 years old	1	4	5
18 years old or older	12	6	18

Table 3*Ages and Genders of Foster Children Currently Placed in Participants' Homes*

Age of Child	Male	Female	Total
Less than 1 year	8	7	15
1 year old	9	8	17
2 years old	9	6	15
3 years old	10	2	12
4 years old	8	3	11
5 years old	3	3	6
6 years old	2	5	7
7 years old	6	6	12
8 years old	3	3	6
9 years old	5	0	5
10 years old	3	1	4
11 years old	1	1	2
12 years old	2	1	3
13 years old	3	4	7
14 years old	0	3	3
15 years old	0	1	1
16 years old	0	2	2
17 years old	0	1	1
18 years old or older	0	0	0

Table 4

Ages and Genders of Foster Children Placed in the Participants' Home in the last Six Months but No Longer Reside in the Home.

Age of Child	Male	Female	Total
Less than 1 year	5	5	10
1 year old	1	3	4
2 years old	6	2	8
3 years old	4	3	7
4 years old	3	2	5
5 years old	3	2	5
6 years old	0	1	1
7 years old	1	0	1
8 years old	0	0	0
9 years old	2	1	3
10 years old	0	1	1
11 years old	0	1	1
12 years old	0	1	1
13 years old	0	1	1
14 years old	0	0	0
15 years old	1	1	2
16 years old	1	1	2
17 years old	0	2	2
18 years old or older	0	0	0

Finally, when reporting on timing of children placed in participants' home, fifty participants reported having a child currently having a child placed in their home at the time they took the survey. Thirteen reported they did not. Seven respondents did not report if they have a child currently placed in their home. Furthermore, fifty participants had a child placed in their home for the past three months. Thirteen reported they did not and seven did not report on the item at all. Fifty-six participants reported they had a foster child placed in their home within the past six months. Seven participants reported they had not had a child placed in their home within the past six months and seven participants did not report on the item.

Research Question One: How Satisfied Are Oklahoma Foster Parents in Their Marital Relationship?

The marital satisfaction of the participants was measured by Funk & Rogge's (2007) Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI). Fifty-seven of the participants responded to the CSI portion of the survey. The first item of the CSI, *Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship*, was measured on a seven-point Likert scale. In the Likert Scale, one was equivalent to *extremely unhappy* and Seven was equivalent to *perfect*. The mean for this first CSI item was 4.47, meaning participants were generally happy in their relationship. The standard deviation for this item was 1.20. The second CSI item stated *I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner*. The item was measured on a six-point Likert scale. In terms of the Likert Scale, one equivalent to *not at all true* and seven equivalent to *completely true*. The mean for this item was 4.82, meaning participants believed it was true that their relationship was warm and comfortable. The standard deviation for this item was found to be 1.1. The third CSI item stated *How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?* It was also measured on a six-point Likert scale where one equivalent to *not at all* and seven equivalent to *completely*. The mean for the third item was 4.84, meaning participants believed that their relationship with their

partner is mostly or almost completely rewarding. The standard deviation for this item was found to be 1.16. Finally, the fourth CSI item stated *In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?* This item was measured on a six-point Likert scale where one equivalates *not at all* and six equivalates *completely*. The mean for this item was found to be 4.88, meaning participants were mostly or almost completely satisfied in their relationship. The standard deviation for this item was 1.05.

Research Question Two: To What Extent do Oklahoma Foster Parents Experience Stress Related to Foster Parenting?

Stress was measured by the utilization of five different items addressing general stress level, the level of stress the participant has experienced personally, and the level of stress the participant perceives their spouse has experienced. General stress was measured by a one-item measure of stress symptoms, which was developed by Elo Leppänen, & Jahkola (2003). The one-item measure states *Stress refers to a situation where a person feels tense, restless, nervous, or anxious, or is unable to sleep at night because his/her mind is troubled all the time. Do you feel that kind of stress these days?* The item is measured on a five-point Likert Scale where one is equivalent to *not at all* and five is equivalent to *very much*. The mean result for this item was 3.05, meaning, to some extent, participants do experience stress symptoms in the way the item measure describes. The standard deviation for this item was .936.

Next, the personal appraisal of stress experienced while fostering was measured by two items: *I have experienced a considerable amount of stress as a foster parent.* and *I have experienced a considerable amount of emotional distress in relation to a foster child's past and/or any associated behavioral problems.* Both of these items were measured by a seven-point Likert scale where one equivalated *strongly disagree* and seven equivalated *strongly agree*. The mean for the first item regarding stress related to being a foster parent was found to be 5.32,

meaning participants somewhat agreed to the item. The standard deviation for this item was 1.726. The mean for the second item regarding emotional stress related to a foster child they have cared for was found to be 5.16, meaning participants somewhat agreed to the item. The mean for this item was 1.694.

Finally, the appraisal of stress participants believed their spouse has experienced was measured by two items: *My spouse has experienced a considerable amount of stress as a foster parent.* and *My spouse has experienced a considerable amount of emotional distress in relation to a foster child's past and/or any associated behavioral problems.* These two items were measured on the same Likert scale as the personal appraisal of stress experienced while fostering. The mean for the first item was found to be 5.47, meaning participants somewhat agreed with the statement. The standard deviation for this item was 1.419. The mean for the second item was found to be 5.07, meaning participants somewhat agreed with the second statement as well. This item had a standard deviation of 1.736.

When correlational analysis between the CSI and the five stress items were run, only one significant correlation was found. There was found to be a $-.363$ correlation between overall relationship satisfaction and the level of agreeableness to the item *My spouse has experienced a considerable amount of stress as a foster parent.* The negative correlation reveals that as relationship satisfaction increases, the participant's appraisal of their spouse's stress decreased.

Research Question Three: How do Oklahoma Foster Parents Perceive Aspects of Fostering to Have Impacted Their Marital Relationship?

Foster parents' perceptions of how foster parenting has impacted their marital relationship were measured by means of three open ended items at the end of the survey instrument (survey questions 26, 27, and 28). Although fifty-seven participants fully completed the closed-ended items of the survey, forty-eight of those fifty-seven participants responded to

the three open-ended items. The three open-ended item responses were analyzed separately. Each response was given an initial code, then the initial codes were combined into axial codes, and then refined into final code categories. Item twenty-eight was coded once and not refined any further. This was done because the responses were notably diverse and reducing the codes further would over refine the data.

Challenges

Forty-four respondents indicated on item twenty-six that foster parenting has challenged their marital relationship in some way. The remaining four respondents reported that they did not believe foster parenting had negatively impacted their marital relationship; however, they did not explain why they believed foster parenting had not challenged their marital relationship. It should also be noted that there were two respondents that reported that foster parenting had challenged their marital relationship and did not explain why they believed this.

The forty-two affirmative responses that provided explanation were distributed into four main categories. Some responses encompassed more than one of the four categories and, therefore, were categorized under multiple categories. These categories include Child Challenges, Relationship, Time Challenges, and System Challenges. Fifteen responses were categorized as Child Challenges, fourteen responses were categorized as Relationship Origin, ten were categorized as System Challenges, and ten were categorized as Time Challenges. In the following paragraphs explanations of each of the categories are provided along with selected supporting quotes. Table 5 provides a full list of all initial codes, combined codes, and axial codes for item twenty-six.

Table 5

Challenges to The Marital Relationship

Participant	Yes/No	Initial Codes	Combined Codes	Axial Codes
1	Yes	Personalities	Couple Conflict	Child Challenges
2	Yes	Opinions on Process	Couple Conflict	Relationship Origin
3	Yes	Child Addition	Child Integration	Child Challenges
4	Yes	Parenting Disagreements	Participant	Relationship Origin
5	Yes	Parenting	Parenting Conflict	Relationship Origin
6	Yes	Child Behaviors	Child Behaviors	Child Challenges
7	Yes	Child Demands	Child Behaviors	Child Challenges
8	Yes	Bridging	Biological Family Relationships	System Challenges
9	Yes	Busyness	Time Consumption	Time Challenges
10	Yes	Communication, Busyness	Communication, Time Consumption	Relationship Origin & Time Challenges
11	Yes	Time Consumption, Exhaustion	Time Consumption, Exhaustion	Time Challenges
12	Yes	System Demands	System Demands	System Challenges
13	Yes	Parenting Differences	Parenting Conflict	Relationship Origin
14	Yes	Discipline	Parenting Conflict	Relationship Origin
15	Yes	Finances	Financial Strain	System Challenges
16	Yes	Consuming Stress, Child Fondness, Biological Family, Worry of Future, Intentional Togetherness	Stress, Biological Family Relationships	System Challenges
17	Yes	Alone Time	Time Consumption	Time Challenges
18	Yes	Busyness, Communication	Time Consumption, Couple Conflict	Time Challenges & Relationship Origin
19	Yes	Biological Families	Biological Family Relationships	System Challenges
20	Yes	Number of Children Desired	Couple Conflict	Relationship Origin
21	No	None	None	None
22	No	None	None	None
23	No	None	None	None
24	No	None	None	None
25	Yes	Quality Time	Time Consumption	Time Challenges
26	Yes	Privacy	Time Consumption	Time Challenges
27	Yes	Stress, Behavior Problems, Worry of Future, Child Sleep, Child Bonding	Stress, Child Behaviors	Child Challenges & System Challenges
28	Yes	Finances	Financial Strain	System Challenges
29	Yes	Child Needs, Lack of Alone Time	Child Behaviors, Time Consumption	Child Challenges & Time
30	Yes	Prioritizing Children, Parenting Disagreement, Time Consumption	Child Demands, Couple Conflict, Time Consumption	Child Challenges, Relationship Origin & Time Challenges
31	Yes	Prioritizing Children	Child Demands	Child Challenges
32	Yes	Parenting Disagreements	Couple Conflict	Relationship Origin
33	Yes	None	None	None
34	Yes	None	None	None
35	Yes	Child Behaviors	Child Behaviors	Child Challenges
36	Yes	Prioritizing Children	Child Demands	Child Challenges
37	Yes	Prioritizing Children	Child Demands	Child Challenges
38	Yes	Child Demands, Case Challenges	Child Demands, System Challenges	Child Challenges & System Challenges
39	Yes	Number of Children	Couple Conflict	Relationship Origin
40	Yes	Unfamiliar Children	Child Demands	Child Challenges
41	Yes	Additional Children, Biological Family, Parenting Differences	Child Demands, Biological Family Relationships, Couple Conflict	Child Challenges, System Challenges & Relationship Origin
42	Yes	DHS Relationship	System Challenges	System Challenges
43	Yes	Stress, Worry of the Future	Stress, System Challenges	System Challenges
44	Yes	Prioritizing Children	Child Demands	Child Challenges
45	Yes	Alone Time, Decision Making	Time Consumption, Couple Conflict	Time Challenges & Relationship Origin
46	Yes	Case Demands	System Challenges	System Challenges
47	Yes	Lack of Freedom	Child Demands	Child Challenges
48	Yes	Differing Opinions	Couple Conflict	Relationship Origin

Participants mentioned challenges to their marital relationship that related to the foster child they were caring for. These responses were coded into the theme “Child Challenges.” Fifteen participants cited challenges related to this theme. Some of the responses from participants that encompassed this theme included:

“Behavioral issues with children that allow little to no time with spouse.”

“Behaviors and health issues with the foster/adopted children that put us against each other anytime it’s possible.”

“Yes, our experience has been that foster children have a lot of energy and few boundaries. This creates an enormous amount of extra care by both parents which doesn’t allow for either of us to get a break.”

As demonstrated by the quotes, foster children can display unique needs that can deter married couples from tending to their relationship.

When responding to how fostering has challenged their relationship, some participants gave responses that seemed to show that foster parenting exacerbated relationship issues that existed before fostering. Fourteen responses encompassed this theme. These responses were coded into the theme “Relationship Origin.” Some of the responses from participants that encompassed this theme included:

“Balance in parenting.”

“Differences in parenting styles.”

“Being on the same page with decisions.”

These responses elude to the idea that foster parenting can bring about differing perspectives in decision making and parenting.

Some participants also mentioned challenges having to do with the child welfare system that have impacted their relationship. These responses were coded into the theme “System

Challenges.” Ten participant responses related to system challenges. Some of the responses from participants that encompassed this theme included:

“Just having to share the child with bio parent and family. It’s been stressful.”

“The financial part! The money reimbursement is not enough.”

“Yes, the way DHS treats us. They have forced us to hire our own attorney to protect us and our family.”

Responses from this theme may insinuate that foster parents may believe some aspects of the child welfare system place heightened stress on foster parents, which has impacted their marital relationship.

The final theme for item 26 was entitled “Time Challenges.” Responses that demonstrated this theme revealed that foster parenting is uniquely time consuming. These responses were coded into the theme “Time Challenges.” Ten responses encompassed this theme. Some of the responses from participants that encompassed this theme included:

“Busyness that takes time away from spouse.”

“Considerable less couple time together and stress of her care makes us mentally and physically exhausted when we do get time.”

“We are fostering our grandchildren and one of them has lots of problems to the point that we have counseling three times a week and had to move her into our room to make sure she doesn’t go through the house and get into stuff in the middle of the night. This limits our alone time together.”

Positive Impact

Forty-six respondents indicated on item twenty-seven that foster parenting has positively impacted their relationship in some way. The remaining two respondents reported that they did not believe foster parenting had positively impacted their marital relationship. It should also be

noted that there were three respondents that reported that foster parenting had positively impacted their marital relationship but did not explain why they believed this.

The forty-three affirmative responses that provided explanation were distributed into four main categories. Some responses encompassed more than one of the four categories and, therefore, were categorized under multiple categories. These categories include Relationship Growth, Family Development, Parenting, and Personal Growth. Twenty-seven were categorized as Relationship Growth, ten were categorized as Parenting, four were categorized as Family Development, and six were categorized as Personal Growth. In the following paragraphs explanations of each of the categories are provided along with selected supporting quotes. Table 6 provides a full list of all initial codes, combined codes, and axial codes for item twenty-seven.

Table 6*Positive Impact on The Marital Relationship*

Participant	Yes/No	Initial Codes	Refined Codes	Axial Codes
1	Yes	Couple Growth, Problem Solving	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
2	Yes	Parenting Growth, Love, Spousal Support	Parenting Tactics, Spousal Support	Parenting, Relationship Growth
3	Yes	Family Completion	Family Additions	Family Development
4	Yes	Team Mentality, Confidence	Spousal Support	Relationship Growth
5	Yes	Parenting Growth	Parenting Tactics	Parenting
6	Yes	Family Enjoyment	Family Time	Family Development
7	Yes	Spousal Support	Spousal Support	Relationship Growth
8	Yes	Goal Unity	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
9	Yes	Team Mentality	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
10	Yes	Communication	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
11	Yes	Altruism, Team Mentality	Spousal Support	Relationship Growth
12	Yes	Child Fondness	Family Additions	Parenting
13	Yes	Team Mentality	Spousal Support	Relationship Growth
14	Yes	Child Fondness, Altruism	Family Additions	Parenting
15	Yes	Fulfillment	Personal Satisfaction	Personal Growth
16	Yes	Openness, Altruism, Marital Altruism	Life Perspective, Spousal Support	Personal Growth, Relationship Growth
17	Yes	Family Bonding	Family Time	Family Development
18	Yes	Communication	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
19	Yes	Patience	Life Perspective	Personal Growth
20	Yes	Team Mentality	Spousal Support	Relationship Growth
21	Yes	Couple Bond	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
22	Yes	Couple Bond	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
23	Yes	None	None	None
24	Yes	Parenting Enjoyment	Family Time	Parenting
25	Yes	Finances	Family Time	Family Development
26	Yes	Communication	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
27	Yes	Parenting Growth	Parenting Tactics	Parenting
28	Yes	Parenting Growth	Parenting Tactics	Parenting
29	Yes	Altruism, Personal Growth	Life Perspective, Personal Satisfaction	Personal Growth
30	Yes	Communication, Bonding Grief	Relationship Interaction, Spousal Support	Relationship Growth
31	Yes	Team Mentality	Spousal Support	Relationship Growth
32	Yes	Communication	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
33	Yes	None	None	None
34	Yes	None	None	None
35	Yes	Relationship Prioritization	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
36	Yes	Changed Perspective	Life Perspective	Personal Growth, Relationship Growth
37	Yes	Parenting Confidence	Parenting Tactics	Parenting
38	Yes	Spouse Respect, Team Mentality, Communication	Spousal Support, Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
39	Yes	None	None	None
40	Yes	Team Mentality	Spousal Support	Relationship Growth
41	No	Divorce, Child Addition	Divorce, Child Addition	Divorce, Parenting
42	Yes	Religious Satisfaction	Personal Satisfaction	Personal Growth
43	Yes	Communication	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
44	Yes	Team Mentality	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
45	Yes	Communication	Relationship Interaction	Relationship Growth
46	Yes	Parenting Confidence	Parenting Tactics	Parenting
47	Yes	Bond Over Child	Family Additions	Relationship Growth, Parenting
48	No	Partner Impatience	Partner Impatience	Partner Frustration

Many respondents revealed that the challenge of foster parenting has encouraged marital relationship growth. These responses were coded into the theme “Relationship Growth.”

Twenty-six participants cited positive impacts related to this theme. Some of the responses from participants that encompassed this theme included:

“Being a foster family has above everything else opened our eyes to all different types of people and families. It has helped us to continually focus on others and not ourselves. Being selfless is a vital part of marriage, each of us putting the other above our own needs. Fostering has strengthened and reinforced this belief.”

“Yes, it has created better communication.”

“I think if we did not have a strong relationship prior to fostering we would not have made it. We have only been fostering for one year! But in the last year we have had so many ups and downs. I think we have had a lot of negative things happen while fostering but it has strengthened our marriage without a doubt.”

These responses and others reveal that although fostering has been a challenge to couples, the challenge has grown their relationship.

When responding to how fostering has positively impacted their relationship, some participants gave responses that seemed to show that foster parenting has helped them become better parents together. Ten responses encompassed this theme. These responses were coded into the theme “Parenting.” Some of the responses from participants that encompassed this theme included:

“It has helped us grow together more as parents.”

“Yes, we have grown and learned so many ways to parent.”

“Yes. Knowing we can handle four kids at one time.”

It could be concluded from these responses, and others coded as this theme, that fostering has

increased parenting confidence between the couples.

Some participant responses addressed positive impacts to their marriage related to the growth of their family. These responses were coded into the theme “Family Development.” Four participant responses related to this theme. Some of the responses from participants that encompassed this theme included:

“We are a large family now and have a lot of fun doing family stuff.”

“More family bonding with bio kids and family unit as a whole.”

“Yes! We feel that our family is complete now that we have our foster son.”

These responses insinuate that fostering has positively impacted the participant’s relationship by fulfilling the couple’s common goal of adding to their family.

Some participants cited personal growth they have experienced, which has inherently impacted their marital relationship. These responses were coded into the theme “Personal Growth.” Six responses encompassed this theme. Some of the responses from participants that encompassed this theme included:

“Yes, it has made us both more patient.”

“Yes, we don’t really have petty arguments anymore. So much has been put into perspective. Things that would have annoyed me about my husband now no longer even register on my radar anymore.”

“Fulfillment.”

The responses for this theme show that the foster parent respondents experience growth and satisfaction individually, which inherently impacts their relationship.

Finally, there were two respondents that did not believe fostering had positively impacted their marital relationship. One respondent experienced divorce as a result of their foster parenting experience and another cited experiencing frustration with their partner as a result of how they

handle their foster parenting journey. Their responses included:

“Not for me. It ended in divorce, but I get my kids, so I am happy with the end result.”

“No. My husband gets irritated quickly.”

These respondents did believe, overall, that their marital relationship did not experience a positive impact as a result of fostering; however, the majority of participants did believe they had experienced a positive impact.

Is Foster Parenting Pose More of a Positive Impact or a Challenge to the Marital Relationship?

Forty-six participants responded to item twenty-eight, regarding whether they believe foster parenting has more positively impacted their marital relationship or more so challenged their marital relationship. Twenty-two respondents indicated that foster parenting has more positively impacted their relationship rather than challenged it. Six respondents did not expand on why they believe their marital relationship was more positively impacted. Fifteen respondents indicated that foster parenting more so challenged their relationship; however, six did not explain why they believed this. The remaining nine respondents reported that their experience foster parenting had equally challenged their relationship and positively impacted it. Of these nine respondents, two did not explain why they believed this.

Because responses for item twenty-eight were considerably diverse, the responses that did provide explanation were coded once and not refined any further. This decision was made in order to avoid over reducing the data and losing important information provided by the participants. In the following paragraphs an overview of responses for each of the three response types mentioned in the previous paragraph will be provided along with selected quotes for each response type. Table 7 provides a full list of all response types and codes for item twenty-eight.

Table 7*Marital Impact Perceived as More Positive or Challenged*

Participant	Challenged /Positive	Codes
1	Positive	Chose it, Known Difficulty, Happy Sacrifice
2	Challenged	None
3	Positive	None
4	Positive	Communication
5	Both	None
6	Positive	Rewarding Sacrifice
7	Both	Destructive Reward
8	Positive	Noble Helper
9	Positive	None
10	Both	Difficult Moments
11	Challenged	Lack of Resources, Time Demands, Child Behaviors, Discouragingly Draining
12	Positive	Child Fondness
13	Both	None
14	Positive	None
15	Positive	Fulfilling
16	Positive	Relationship Growth, Family Growth, Marriage Support, Repercussions of Counseling
17	Positive	Reposing Appreciation
18	Positive	Grown Closeness
19	Challenged	None
20	Positive	Team Mentality, Outside Comfort Zone
21	Positive	None
22	None	None
23	Positive	Religious Satisfaction
24	Positive	Family Growth
25	Positive	None
26	Both	Better Communication/Parenting Differences
27	Challenged	Stress, Sleep
28	Challenged	Financial Depletion
29	Both	Altruism/Lack of Alone Time
30	Both	Fostering Difficulties/Strengthened Marriage
31	Challenged	Lack of Together Time
32	Both	Healthy Challenge
33	Challenged	Adoption Disagreement
34	Challenged	None
35	None	None
36	Positive	Team Mentality
37	Challenged	None
38	Positive	Child Knowledge
39	Both	Partner Attunement, Compassion/ Lack of Couple Time, Financial Burden
40	Challenged	Stress, Child Behaviors, Biological Families
41	Challenged	None
42	Challenged	Religious Warfare, DHS Corruption
43	Positive	Positive Over time
44	Challenged	Draining
45	Challenged	None
46	Positive	Rewarding Challenge
47	Positive	None
48	Challenged	Conflictual Parenting

Respondents most often reported that fostering has more positively impacted their marital relationship. Respondents cited reasons for this belief such as improved communication, increased closeness between them and their partner, the satisfaction they experienced as a couple as a result of fostering, and a change in perspective by viewing themselves and their partner as a team. Some of the responses from participants that encompassed this response category included:

“I think in the grand scheme it has been positively impacted. I feel like we face life as a team now.”

“Positive. We are closer.”

“Positive impact. It has been hard but so rewarding.”

These responses and others reveal that although fostering has been a challenge to couples, the challenge has improved their relationship.

The second most common response type was that foster parenting had more so challenged their marital relationship. Some respondent explanations mentioned the lack of support they have in their fostering journey, the financial strain they experience due to fostering, and the lack of time the parents have to spend with their spouse. Some of the responses from participants that encompassed this response category included:

“More challenged. There are few resources for both traumatized and intellectually challenged children. We spend a great deal of time trying to find the right treatments for our child in addition to helping manage her disruptive behaviors. It has been spiritually, emotionally, and physically draining and it is unlikely that it gets any easier.”

“More challenging due to it costing more to take care of the child than what we get reimbursement for, which causes financial problems.”

“It has been challenging to spend time together.”

These responses tend to indicate that foster parenting can become consuming to the expense of the parents' marital relationship.

Finally, many respondents reported that they believed fostering has both challenged their marital relationship while also positively impacting it. Respondents that answered in this way seemed to mention positive impacts and challenges mentioned in the previous two response type categories; however, they did not believe that the challenges were more consuming than the positive impacts. Some of the responses from participants that encompassed this response category included:

“Both positive and negative impact. Positive: more and better communication. Negative: conflict over different parenting styles.”

“Both. By challenging us it has positively impacted us.”

“Both. It has brought us closer as we try to stay in tune with how each other is feeling now. We are moved by how compassionate one another is but the challenges certainly take a toll too. There is very little time to spend with one another and the financial burden has greatly increased.”

These responses tend to indicate that foster parenting does challenge the marital relationship; however, the couples are experiencing improvements in their relationship as a result of fostering.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how foster parenting impacts the marital relationship. As foster parents face fostering challenges related to fostering such as system challenges, behavioral challenges of a child, the traumatic histories of the children they are caring for, and more; higher levels of stress are introduced to the marital relationship. This research study sought to begin to look at how the unique stressors of foster parents impact their relationship by answering three research questions. By understanding how fostering may impact the relationship, those working with foster parents as well as foster parents themselves may be more fully prepared for the challenges that fostering can pose to the relationship. The demographics of the participants for this study were rather limited; however, the responses can begin to explain the challenges that fostering can introduce to the marital relationship.

Research Question One: How Satisfied Are Oklahoma Foster Parents in Their Marital Relationship?

The results of the Couples Satisfaction Index revealed that the participants were relatively happy in their relationship, felt their relationship was relatively warm and happy, felt their relationship with their partner is rewarding, and were satisfied overall in their relationship. The results of the CSI seem to tie into the many of the open-ended responses that will be discussed in the next section; however, the level of satisfaction of the participants is interesting. One might expect that the level of stressors foster parents experience would result in lower levels of relationship satisfaction; however, this was not necessarily the case for this study. Upon reviewing literature, an explanation can be proposed.

Research on parents of children with autism has revealed that high levels of marital satisfaction has been found to mediate the stress felt as a result of parenting a child with autism (Brown, Whiting, Kahumoku-Fessler; Witting, & Jensen, 2020; Bristol, Gallagher, Schopler,

1988). The same could be true for the participants of this study. The participants could have had positive levels of marital satisfaction prior to becoming foster parents; therefore, their marriage, or the satisfaction in their marriage, operates as a buffer to the stress they experience as foster parents. The marital satisfaction of the participants acting as a buffer to stress would also explain the lower than expected levels of stress experienced by participants and their spouses.

Unfortunately, this study was not able to measure marital satisfaction prior to fostering and marital satisfaction after becoming foster parent so there is no way to confirm this theory with the data from this study. Nevertheless, the higher levels of relationship satisfaction of participants are important to note.

Research Question Two: To What Extent do Oklahoma Foster Parents Experience Stress Related to Foster Parenting?

It is interesting to note that the results on the one-item stress symptom measure revealed that although foster parents do experience a notable amount of stress, the overall mean score of the participants did not fall in the higher end of the scale. Given the many stressors discussed in the literature review, it is interesting that the mean score was not higher. Furthermore, the appraisal of the stress experienced by both the participant themselves and their spouse were only relatively agreed with, meaning they agreed that they believed they and their spouse do experience stress related to fostering; however, the appraisal was not notably high. There could be a number of contributing factors related to the slightly milder appraisals of stress. One could be that the participants were well trained and prepared for what they would experience as foster parents. They could also have healthy self-care practices put in place so the felt stress of their fostering experience is lessened.

Finally, the correlational analysis results for research question two were relatively surprising given there was only one statistically significant correlation. It was expected that more

of the items would have been correlated. The only significant correlation was the more satisfied the participant was in their marriage, the less likely the participant was to report that their spouse experiences a higher level of stress related to being a foster parent. When considering this correlation, it seems logical. Generally, the participants are experiencing stress related to fostering; however, their reports reveal they are only moderately displaying stress symptoms, despite the higher levels of reported stress. This likely resulted in the lack of correlation found between the stress related items and marital satisfaction.

Research Question Three: How do Oklahoma Foster Parents Perceive Aspects of Fostering to Have Impacted Their Marital Relationship?

The data obtained from the open-ended items of this study are likely the most notable findings of this study. Regarding challenges to their marital relationship, all but four respondents agreed that fostering had challenged their marital relationship. Nine responses cited some sort of conflict between the married couple. The responses such as these that were coded as “Relationship Origin” commonly entailed disagreements about parenting that the participants have. The rest of the responses cited challenges outside of the marital relationship that the participants believe have ultimately impacted their marriage. Commonly mentioned challenges included the time that fostering consumes in their lives, the behavioral challenges of the children they care for, and a plethora of challenges the Oklahoma Department of Human Services can present to foster families. It was common for participants to explain that these outside challenges distracted from them tending to their relationship with their spouse. Overall, there was somewhat of a consensus that fostering places challenges on the marital relationship; however, based upon the overall results of the CSI being that the participants were relatively satisfied in their relationships, these challenges have not presented as a devastation to the marital satisfaction of participants.

Most interestingly, all but two participants believed that foster parenting had positively impacted their marriage in some way. Twenty-six respondents cited some sort of growth of interaction within their marriage. For example, responses often eluded to increased closeness between them and their spouse, better communication within the relationship, and participants viewing them and their spouse as a team. Outside of growth within the marriage, many participants viewed their fostering journey to have had positive impacts such as the experienced joy of growing their family, a new life perspective, and individual life satisfaction. The two participants that believed fostering had not had a positive impact on their relationship expressed dissatisfaction with their spouse's patience and one even reported that fostering contributed to their divorce. Aside from these two responses, the results seem to nudge at the idea that fostering could be a positive bonding experience for married couples.

Finally, regarding whether participants viewed the impact of fostering as more positive or more challenging, twenty-two participants believed their marriage had been more positively impacted. Nine believed the positive aspects and challenges were equally impactful. Fifteen believed their marriage had been more so challenged. Aside from the fifteen participants that saw fostering to have presented more challenges to their relationships, there were a total of 31 participants that saw fostering to have brought about positive growth within their relationship. This information seems to suggest that many foster parents, to some extent, have been positively impacted by fostering. Upon considering this information, it was theorized that the participants' number of biological children could be an explanation. Of the 70 participants included in analysis, twenty-five did not report having biological children, which leaves the majority of participants having experienced the challenges of traditional parenthood. It could be theorized that the participants who have had biological children have already met and adapted to the challenges of traditional parenthood. On the other hand, those that have not parented biological

children, could be parenting for the first time through foster care. This leaves them not only navigating and learning general parenting, but also parenting within the challenges of foster care. Having experienced traditional parenthood, participants and their partners could have found the challenges of foster parenting to not be as arduous due to their previous parenting experience. This could allow for the participants' experience as foster parents to be more formative rather than challenging, as the data may suggest.

Possible Implications of the Findings

It is difficult to apply the information gained through this study since there were some significant limitations of the study, which will be discussed in the following section; however, there are some things that professionals working with foster parents can keep in mind.

Professionals such as social workers, therapists, and even parent educators work with foster parents and this study has presented information that each of these types of professionals could keep in mind.

For social workers, it is imperative to thoroughly assess the marital relationship of prospective foster parents during the certification process. It is no secret that parents welcoming a biological child into the family can exacerbate any preexisting issues within the marital relationship. Given the added challenges regarding foster parenting that participants cited in this study, foster parenting has the potential to present harm to the marital relationship. This is why it would be important for professionals certifying foster parents to look for issues within the marital relationship prior to certifying. Certifying a couple already experiencing challenges in their marriage could result in a shorter duration of fostering by the foster parents because the challenges experienced while fostering could exacerbate preexisting marital issues. On the other hand, based upon this study's findings, a couple with a strong marriage prior to being certified could find the experience of fostering to be beneficial to their marriage.

For therapists, it would be important to be aware of the challenges the participants mentioned in this study. Foster parenting brings about unique stressors related to the child welfare system, trauma, finances, time consumption, and more. Knowing these challenges, how they could impact a relationship, and how to teach couples to resolve issues related to the challenges could be invaluable to the well-being of foster parents. Based upon the findings of this study, fostering can present challenges to even happy marriages; therefore, a professional that counsels parents through the challenges could be invaluable to couples and even the foster care system as a whole.

Many participants in the study cited tensions related to parenting practices. Parent education is a resource commonly implemented with parents who have had some sort of child welfare services intervention (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020). Given the struggles participants revealed regarding parenting, a parent education program designed to give foster parents parenting strategies specifically geared toward parenting a foster child could be beneficial and help married foster parents be on the same page regarding parenting. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services does require a pre-certification training that addresses parenting practices; however, a more extensive parent education program could be beneficial (Oklahoma Department of Human Service, 2018b).

Overall, professionals working with foster parents should be mindful of how the challenges of foster parenting can impact their marital relationship. It seems that it could be important for social workers to thoroughly assess the couple's marriage prior to certification, therapists to be mindful of and know how to help foster parents resolve challenges experienced by foster parents, and parent educators to expand services specifically to foster parents. Further research on the subject of this study is needed to affirm these implications as well as expand them.

Study Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, there are many limitations of it to be noted. Other than the study conducted by Russell (2014), research of the same nature as this study could not be located during the literature review process. Russell's study underscored the importance communication has for marital quality of foster parent and the study's findings did corroborate with much of the open-ended item data regarding communication of this research study. Nevertheless, Russell's study took the perspective of communication; whereas, this study largely emphasized the stressors of fostering and how they impact marital satisfaction. The limited research on this topic left the study exploratory in nature, which gave rise to limitations of the study. The major limitations of the study to be discussed include, the size and demographics of the sample, the lack of measure on the specific duration of fostering each participant had endured, as well as the lack of account for adopted children in the home of participants. Based on these limitations there are certainly some recommendations for how future research should proceed.

Although the sample size for the study was decent at seventy responses, only fifty-four of these participants fully completed every item of the survey. This resulted in missing data, primarily within the open-ended portion of the survey. Although disappointing, the lack of completion was not surprising given the study was conducted online, over social media. This avenue of data collection allows little room to encourage participants to fully complete the survey. Although, seventy participants was an adequate sample size, the number could have been larger considering there were 4,297 foster homes in Oklahoma in 2018 (OKDHS, 2018a). Furthermore, the demographics of the participants certainly could have been more diverse given the large percentages of females, Caucasian individuals, and higher income individuals that participated in the study. Having a larger sample, a more diverse sample, and more complete data

could have yielded different results in this study. Thus, it would be important for future research on this subject to have a larger and more representative sample.

Additionally, this study did not measure for the specific length of time the participant had been fostering. The study did evaluate if the participants currently had a placement, had a placement within the past six months, and had a placement in the past three months. Data was not gathered on, cumulatively, how long the participant had been fostering. Having this data could have shed more light on the data gained. For example, if many participants had been fostering for a long duration of time, many participants could have become adapted to the struggles of fostering; therefore, their marriage could have adapted over time, explaining the levels of marital satisfaction and stress related to fostering. Gaining this information in future studies could reveal if there are any differences in marital satisfaction between couples who have fostered for a longer duration and couples who have only started fostering.

Another important limitation is this study did not account for adopted children residing in the homes of participants. The phrasing of the survey items measuring for children in the participants' homes accounted for foster children and biological children; however, it failed to account for children that the participants had adopted. In all actuality there could have been more children in the participants' homes than what data revealed. Having this information could have shed more light on foster parents' stressors; therefore, it would be important for future research to keep this in mind.

Finally, there was a self-selection bias within this study because participation was voluntary. Participants were members of the social media groups the survey was posted in and, ultimately, participants were those willing and able to complete the online survey. It is likely that significant portions of the foster parent population did not participate in the survey due to a number of reasons such as inconvenience, not seeing the survey posted, or not being a member

of one of the social media groups the survey was posted in. Future research efforts should attempt to make sampling more random in order to diminish self-selection bias.

As far as recommendations for future research, it should be noted that some of the richest data obtained in this study was qualitative in nature. That being said, it could be advantageous for researchers to take a more strictly qualitative approach with the research topic. Even richer detail about how foster parenting impacts a marriage could be obtained this way. On the other hand, it would also be beneficial to implement a quantitative study on the subject in order to obtain generalizable information that could paint an overarching picture of the research problem, especially because it has been minimally researched. All in all, more research on how fostering impacts a marriage is warranted, especially given the somewhat unexpected results of this research project.

Conclusion

The results of this study reflect the many challenges foster parents face. As proven by the literature reviewed for this study and the responses of foster parents, the ecology of a foster family is far more complex than a traditional family's ecology. There are many more people, institutions, and stressors that influence a foster family. Overall, these findings do support the heart of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecology Theory, which embraces how development is impacted by interaction that occurs within one's ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This study found that the participants had relatively high levels of marital satisfaction, despite the noted stress of participants and the common belief that fostering had negatively impacted their marriage to some extent. Based upon the findings of this study, the high levels of marital satisfaction within the participants' Microsystem, could be a protective factor against the stressful influences existing within the rest of the systems of the couple's ecology. Based upon

many responses in the open-ended portion of the survey, the stressors occurring in a couple's ecology could even be bonding the couple closer together in their marriage.

It is unclear if these findings are an accurate representation of foster parents in Oklahoma due to the limitations of this particular study. Nevertheless, the information obtained from this study could be important for professionals and foster parents to keep in mind, especially if research on the subject continues to be developed. Because the subject of this research has been very limitedly studied, this research does make for a valuable contribution to knowledge of foster parenting. The challenges that foster parents face have been proven through previous research, and this research has been thoroughly discussed in this project. However, how these challenges impact a marriage, needs to be a point of research moving forward in order to more fully understand the implications that fostering can have on those that choose to engage in it. Having a fuller understanding of these implications can help professionals better support foster parents and it can also help foster parents be more prepared for the challenges that fostering may bring.

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APPENDIX

- A. Initial IRB Approval**
- B. IRB Amendment Approval**
- C. Informed Consent**
- D. University of Central Oklahoma Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activities Grant
Funding**
- E. Initial Survey Tool**
- F. Finalized Survey Tool**

A. Initial IRB Approval



July 29, 2019

IRB Application #: 2019-110

Proposal Title: To What Extent Does Fostering Impact the Foster Parent Marital Relationship?

Type of Review: Initial Review-Expedited

Investigator(s):

Hailey McClain
Anita Bertram, Ph.D.

Dear Ms. McClain and Dr. Bertram:

Re: Application for IRB Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

We have received your materials for your application. The UCO IRB has determined that the above named application is APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW. The Board has provided expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110, for research involving no more than minimal risk and research Category 7.

Date of Approval: July 28, 2019

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. A stamped, approved copy of the informed consent form will be made available to you. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used, where applicable. Any modification to the procedures and/or consent form must be approved prior to incorporation into the study. At the completion of the study, please submit a closure request form to close your file.

It is the responsibility of the investigators to promptly report to the IRB any serious or unexpected adverse events or unanticipated problems that may be a risk to the subjects.

Please let us know if the IRB or Office of Research Integrity and Compliance can be of any further assistance to your research efforts. Never hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristi Archuleta', is written over a horizontal line.

Kristi Archuleta, Ed.D.
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A. IRB Amendment Approval



September 19, 2019

IRB Application #: 2019-110

Proposal Title: To What Extent Does Fostering Impact the Foster Parent Marital Relationship?

Type of Review: Modification / Amendment

Investigator(s):

Hailey McClain
Anita Bertram, Ph.D.

Dear Ms. McClain and Dr. Bertram:

Re: Application for Modification/Amendment of Approved IRB Protocol

We have received and reviewed your request for an amendment to your approved IRB application and supporting materials. The UCO IRB approves the following amendments to your application:

Date of Approval: September 19, 2019

Changes including: Changes to the procedure(s) including manipulations, assessments, etc..

It is the responsibility of the investigators to promptly report to the IRB any serious or unexpected adverse events or unanticipated problems that may be a risk to the subjects.

Please let us know if the IRB or Office of Research Integrity and Compliance can be of any further assistance to your research efforts. Never hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'MPowers'.

Melissa Powers, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
University of Central Oklahoma
100 N. University Dr.
Edmond, OK 73034
405-974-5497
irb@uco.edu

B. Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title: To What Extent Does Fostering Impact the Foster Parent Marital Relationship?

Researcher (s): Hailey McClain

A. Purpose of this research: The purpose of this study is to learn more about how foster parenting and the experienced stresses of fostering impact the marital relationships of foster parents.

B. Procedures/treatments involved: You will be asked to complete an online survey.

C. Expected length of participation: Approximately ten minutes.

D. Potential benefits: The anticipated benefits of participating are to help researchers learn more about the relationship between fostering and perceived marital quality of foster parents by studying married Oklahoma foster parents' perceptions of how fostering has impacted their marriage in relation to the stressors that foster parents experience.

E. Potential risks or discomforts: The risks of participating in this study are not predicted to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

F. Contact information for researchers: Hailey McClain (E-mail: hmcclain@uco.edu;
Phone: (405) 923-3284)

G. Contact information for UCO IRB: Office of Research Compliance, Academic Affairs,
University of Central Oklahoma (E-mail: irb@uco.edu; Phone: 405-974-5497)

H. Explanation of confidentiality and privacy: All information collected will be kept confidential. All surveys will be obtained electronically through an online survey tool. Names will not be included on the electronic record. Information will be collected through a security certificate enabled survey collection site. Only the principal investigator and the Co-PI will have access to the data. Once the data collection is complete, a copy of the data file will be stored on the investigators' computers which

**C. University of Central Oklahoma Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activities Grant
Funding**

Hailey McClain:

On behalf of the Office of High-Impact Practices, it is my pleasure to inform you that your Student Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activities (RCSA) Grant proposal has been approved. Members of the Undergraduate Research Creative Activities Team (URCAT) and the Research Advisory Council (RAC) reviewed proposals using the evaluation score sheet posted on the Student RCSA website and included in this packet. Evaluations completed by each reviewer are available in the InfoReady application portal and will be emailed to you. Please review their comments and incorporate their suggestions into future grant proposals that you submit.

The Office of High-Impact Practices is pleased to award to you a ¼-time Research Assistantship in the Department of Human Environmental Sciences beginning in the Fall 2019 semester. You will work 5 hours per week. Undergraduate RAs will be paid \$9.75/hr. and graduate RAs will be paid \$11.375/hr. Although the amount is yet to be determined, you will also receive a partial tuition waiver. You will be receiving additional information in mid-July regarding the Research Assistantship and any payroll training that might be required by the UCO Employment Services Office.

The money of your grant award, as outlined in your budget, will be allocated to the Dean's Office, College of Education and Professional Studies. You can begin to expend your grant award at the beginning of the Fall 2019 semester (starting August 19, 2019). Detailed budget information will follow in mid-July. To insure your eligibility for this program, please provide the Office of High-Impact Practices (ohip@uco.edu; 974-5086) with **your active email address and summer contact information.**

Please be aware that if your research involves human or animal subjects, you are required to submit and receive approval from the UCO Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), respectively, before you begin your research. Please check the Office of Research Compliance website for criteria related to research involving human (IRB) or animal (IACUC) subjects.

Again, congratulations on your award. If the Office of High-Impact Practices can be of further assistance in your research, creative, and scholarly activities on the UCO campus, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Springer
Director, Office of High-Impact Practices

cc. Dr. James Machell
Dr. Brandon Burr

D. Initial Survey Tool

The Effects of Foster Parenting on the Marital Relationships of Oklahoma Foster Parents

Start of Block: Consent

Research Project Title: To What Extent Does Fostering Impact the Foster Parent Marital Relationship?

Researcher (s): Hailey McClain

A. Purpose of this research: The purpose of this study is to learn more about how foster parenting and the experienced stresses of fostering impact the marital relationships of foster parents.

B. Procedures/treatments involved: You will be asked to complete an online survey.

C. Expected length of participation: Approximately ten minutes.

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I. Assurance of voluntary participation: Participation in this study is voluntary and there will be no penalty for not participating. You may choose not to participate or you may choose to stop participating at any point during the survey with no penalty.

Affirmation by Research Subject: By clicking "Yes" I hereby voluntarily agree to participate in the above listed research project and further understand the above listed explanations and descriptions of the research project. I also understand that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty. I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years old. I have read and fully

understand this Informed Consent Form. I agree to participate freely and voluntarily. I acknowledge that if I would like a copy of this consent form I need to print this page.

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Research Project Title: To What Extent Does Fostering Impact the Foster Parent Marital Relationships... = No

End of Block: Consent

Start of Block: Demographic Information

Page Break

2 What is your age in years?

▼ 21 (1) ... 110 (90)

3 What is your sex?

Male (1)

Female (2)

Other (3) _____

4 What is your marital status?

Single (1)

Married (2)

Divorced (3)

Remarried (4)

Separated (5)

5 If you are married, how long have you been married?

▼ N/A (1) ... More than 80 years (80)

6 Which best describes your race/ethnicity?

Asian/Pacific Islander (1)

African American/Black (2)

Hispanic/Latino (3)

Native American/Alaskan Native (4)

White/Caucasian (5)

Middle Easter/Arab (6)

Other (please describe) (7) _____

7 What is your approximate yearly household income?

- \$5,000 or less (1)
 - Between \$5,001 to \$10,000 per year (2)
 - Between \$10,001 to \$20,000 per year (3)
 - Between \$20,001 to \$30,000 per year (4)
 - Between \$30,001 to \$40,000 per year (5)
 - Between \$40,001 to \$50,000 per year (6)
 - Between 50,001 to 60,000 per year (7)
 - Between 60,001 to 70,000 per year (8)
 - Between 70,001 to 80,000 per year (9)
 - Between 80,001 to 90,000 per year (10)
 - Between 90,001 to 100,000 per year (11)
 - More than 100,000 per year (12)
-

8 What is the highest level of education you have earned?

- Some high school (1)
 - High school graduate or GED equivalent (2)
 - Trade/Technical/Vocational schooling (3)
 - Some college (4)
 - College graduate (5)
 - Some graduate schooling (6)
 - Post graduate degree (masters degree, doctorate degree, etc.) (7)
-

9 Which of the following best describes your religious preference?

- Catholic (1)
 - Jewish (2)
 - Evangelical Christian (3)
 - Protestant (e.g. Baptist, Methodist) (4)
 - Non-denominational Christian (5)
 - Other Christian (e.g. Apostolic, LDS or Mormon, Jehovah's Witness) (6)
 - Atheist (7)
 - Agnostic (8)
 - None (9)
 - Other (please describe) (10)
-

End of Block: Demographic Information

Start of Block: Child Information

10 Do you have foster children currently placed in your home?

Yes (1)

No (2)

11 Have you had a foster child residing in your home within the past 6 months?

Yes (1)

No (2)

12 Have you had at least one foster child placed in your home for the past 3 months.

Yes (1)

No (2)

Page Break

End of Block: Child Information

Start of Block: Ages and Sexes of Children

13 Please check the boxes describing the age and sex of each biological child you have. Make multiple selections if you have multiple biological children.

	Male (1)	Female (2)
Less than 1 year old (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 year old. (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 years old (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 years old (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 years old (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 years old (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 years old (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 years old (8)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 years old (9)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 years old (10)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 years old (11)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 years old (12)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12 years old (13)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13 years old (14)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 years old (15)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15 years old (16)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 years old (17)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17 years old (18)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18 years old or older (19)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14 Please check the boxes describing the age and sex of each foster child currently placed in your home. Make multiple selections if you have multiple foster children currently placed in your home.

	Male (1)	Female (2)
Less than 1 year old (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 year old (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 years old (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 years old (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 years old (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 years old (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 years old (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 years old (8)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 years old (9)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 years old (10)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 years old (11)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 years old (12)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12 years old (13)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13 years old (14)

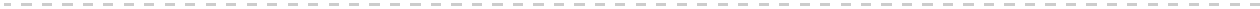
14 years old (15)

15 years old (16)

16 years old (17)

17 years old (18)

18 years old (19)



15 Please check the boxes describing the age and sex of each foster child placed in your home during the past 6 months but is no longer residing in your care. Make multiple selections if this describes multiple children you have cared for.

	Male (1)	Female (2)
Less than 1 year old. (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 year old (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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3 years old (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 years old (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 years old (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 years old (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 years old (8)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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18 years old or older (19)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Page Break

16 Stress refers to a situation where a person feels tense, restless, nervous, or anxious, or is unable to sleep at night because his/her mind is troubled all the time.

Do you feel that kind of stress these days? 1 = not at all 2 = only a little 3 = to some extent 4 = rather much 5 = very much

- Not at all (1)
 - Only a little (2)
 - To some extent (3)
 - Rather much (4)
 - Very Much (5)
-

17 I have experienced a considerable amount of stress as a foster parent.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
 - Somewhat Disagree (2)
 - Disagree (3)
 - Neutral (4)
 - Agree (5)
 - Somewhat Agree (6)
 - Strongly Agree (7)
-

18 I have experienced a considerable amount of emotional distress in relation to a foster child's past and/or any associated behavioral problems.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
 - Somewhat Disagree (2)
 - Disagree (3)
 - Neutral (4)
 - Agree (5)
 - Somewhat Agree (6)
 - Strongly Agree (7)
-

19 My spouse has experienced a considerable amount of stress as a foster parent.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
 - Somewhat Disagree (2)
 - Disagree (3)
 - Neutral (4)
 - Agree (5)
 - Somewhat Agree (6)
 - Strongly Agree (7)
-

20 My spouse has experienced a considerable amount of emotional distress in relation to a foster child's past and/or any associated behavioral problems.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Somewhat Disagree (2)
- Disagree (3)
- Neutral (4)
- Agree (5)
- Somewhat Agree (6)
- Strongly Agree (7)

Page Break

21 Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

- Extremely unhappy (1)
 - Fairly unhappy (2)
 - A little unhappy (3)
 - Happy (4)
 - Very happy (5)
 - Extremely happy (6)
 - Perfect (7)
-

22 I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner.

- Not at all true (1)
 - A little true (2)
 - Somewhat true (3)
 - Mostly true (4)
 - Almost completely true (5)
 - Completely true (6)
-

23 How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?

- Not at all (1)
 - A little (2)
 - Somewhat (3)
 - Mostly (4)
 - Almost Completely (5)
 - Completely (6)
-

24 In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

- Not at all (1)
 - A little (2)
 - Somewhat (3)
 - Mostly (4)
 - Almost completely (5)
 - Completely (6)
-

Page Break

End of Block: Marital Satisfaction

Start of Block: Perceptions of Impact

25 How do you believe foster parenting has impacted your marriage?

26 Are there any services that do not exist, or you are not aware of, that you believe would help in the maintenance of your marital relationship while fostering?

End of Block: Perceptions of Impact

E. Finalized Survey Tool

The Effects of Foster Parenting on the Marital Relationships of Oklahoma Foster Parents

Start of Block: Consent

Research Project Title: To What Extent Does Fostering Impact the Foster Parent Marital Relationship?

Researcher (s): Hailey McClain

A. Purpose of this research: The purpose of this study is to learn more about how foster parenting and the experienced stresses of fostering impact the marital relationships of foster parents.

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Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Research Project Title: To What Extent Does Fostering Impact the Foster Parent Marital Relationships... = No

End of Block: Consent

Start of Block: Demographic Information

Page Break

2 What is your age in years?

▼ 21 (1) ... 110 (90)

3 What Oklahoma county is your primary residence located in?

▼ Adair (1) ... Woodward (77)

4 What is your sex?

Male (1)

Female (2)

Other (3) _____

5 What is your marital status?

Single (1)

Married (2)

Divorced (3)

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-

End of Block: Demographic Information

Start of Block: Child Information

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No (2)

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No (2)

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18 years old or older (19)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



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6 years old (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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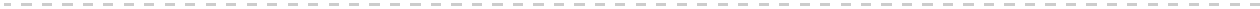
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1 year old (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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4 years old (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 years old (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 years old (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 years old (8)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 years old (9)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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10 years old (11)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Page Break

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-

18 I have experienced a considerable amount of stress as a foster parent.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
 - Somewhat Disagree (2)
 - Disagree (3)
 - Neutral (4)
 - Agree (5)
 - Somewhat Agree (6)
 - Strongly Agree (7)
-

19 I have experienced a considerable amount of emotional distress in relation to a foster child's past and/or any associated behavioral problems.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
 - Somewhat Disagree (2)
 - Disagree (3)
 - Neutral (4)
 - Agree (5)
 - Somewhat Agree (6)
 - Strongly Agree (7)
-

20 My spouse has experienced a considerable amount of stress as a foster parent.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
 - Somewhat Disagree (2)
 - Disagree (3)
 - Neutral (4)
 - Agree (5)
 - Somewhat Agree (6)
 - Strongly Agree (7)
-

21 My spouse has experienced a considerable amount of emotional distress in relation to a foster child's past and/or any associated behavioral problems.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Somewhat Disagree (2)
- Disagree (3)
- Neutral (4)
- Agree (5)
- Somewhat Agree (6)
- Strongly Agree (7)

Page Break

22 Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

- Extremely unhappy (1)
 - Fairly unhappy (2)
 - A little unhappy (3)
 - Happy (4)
 - Very happy (5)
 - Extremely happy (6)
 - Perfect (7)
-

23 I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner.

- Not at all true (1)
 - A little true (2)
 - Somewhat true (3)
 - Mostly true (4)
 - Almost completely true (5)
 - Completely true (6)
-

24 How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?

- Not at all (1)
 - A little (2)
 - Somewhat (3)
 - Mostly (4)
 - Almost Completely (5)
 - Completely (6)
-

25 In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

- Not at all (1)
 - A little (2)
 - Somewhat (3)
 - Mostly (4)
 - Almost completely (5)
 - Completely (6)
-

Page Break

End of Block: Marital Satisfaction

Start of Block: Perceptions of Impact

26 Do you believe there are aspects of foster parenting that have challenged your marital relationship? If so, explain.

27 Do you believe there are aspects of foster parenting that have positively impacted your marital relationship? If so, explain.

28 All things considered, do you think your marital relationship has been more challenged by foster parenting or more positively impacted by foster parenting? Please explain.

End of Block: Perceptions of Impact
