YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT BREAKDOWN:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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This thesis is submitted to the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters in Applied Social Research

Under the supervision of Dr. Paula Mayock.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work. It has not been submitted to this or any other institution for degree or publication.

I authorise the University of Dublin to lend this thesis to other institutes or individuals. I further agree that this thesis may be copied at the request of other institutes or individuals for the purpose of scholarly work.

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Abstract

While there is an expanding body of international literature on the phenomenon of foster care placement breakdown, and its associations with poorer outcomes for children, there is little is known, in Ireland nor internationally, about the nature of the move experience for those closely involved in it. By means of six in-depth qualitative interviews with young people who grew up in state care, this study sought to redress the gaps in Irish literature, and build upon the limited international research which explores young peoples' experiences of placement breakdown. The highly personalised narratives highlighted that placement breakdown has a lasting and deleterious impact, and was characterised as a time of multiple losses. Young people experienced a particularly disenfranchised and disempowered position during placement disruption, with very little knowledge of, or involvement in, decisions that govern their lives. Along with explanations of the immediate precursor to placement breakdown, a number of broader influences emerged as undermining placement stability, particularly young people's connections to their birth families, and the relationships they developed with other children in the foster placement. Having young people as the only participants added a valuable dimension to the existing research knowledge and the findings raise real challenges for social work practice and service provision.

Keywords: Foster Care, Placement Breakdown, Young People, Qualitative, Ireland

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Introduction

In its broadest terms, the research set out to generate an in-depth understanding of young peoples' lived experiences of foster care placement breakdown. Conceptualising 'breakdown' as an experience, rather than an event, reflects a greater sensitivity to what is a highly intimate and emotive reality for many young people with care experience. While there is a vast body of literature on placement breakdown, it has been critiqued for de-contextualising a highly personal experience. Methodologically, these studies have invariably focussed on identifying predictors of disruption or 'placement success', they have consequentially primarily adopted quantitative approaches and they have hugely under-represented young peoples' perspectives. Recently, some international studies have begun to focus on the 'experience' and meaning of placement breakdown, however, research drawing on such conceptualisation is largely absent in the Irish context. Indeed, to date, there has been very little research, of any methodological persuasion, on foster care breakdown in Ireland (CAAB, 2010).

The exploration of experiences such as placement breakdown requires the adoption of a qualitative paradigm. Moreover, in-depth one-to-one qualitative interviews have particular merits, especially as it allows the researcher to delve into personal issues, to understand experiences and to fully explore all factors and influences that underpin participants' responses, be they reasons, feelings and beliefs (Legard et al, 2003; Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

The findings documented in this dissertation are based on narratives garnered for six young people's accounts of their experiences of foster care placement breakdown. The findings presented suggest that, irrespective of their feelings about the endings of disrupted placements, young peoples' accounts highlighted that the breakdowns had deleterious effects, and involved multiple losses. Remarkably, the findings suggest that young people are disenfranchised and disempowered throughout their lives in care, and most especially, at times of placement breakdown. Notably, there were many influences on placement stability, particularly young people's connections to their birth families, and the relationships they developed with other children in the placement, which were not necessarily the explanation for the breakdown, but often undermined the course of the placement. The final chapter engages in a discussion of key findings, whilst also highlighting a range of implications for social work practice.

The dissertation begins with providing an overview of the foster care system, including legislation and key concepts, followed by an examination of the research literature on foster care placement breakdown (Chapter One). Subsequently, Chapter two outlines the research methodology, including the design, approach, data collection, recruitment and sampling, data management and analysis and

finally, ethical considerations. Chapter four presents the findings pertaining to young peoples' narratives of placement breakdown. Drawing on the information gleaned from the findings, Chapter five identifies five key issues for discussion and then outlines recommendations for future research.

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Introduction

This chapter will review Irish and international literature in the field of the foster care breakdown. First, the chapter will explore the context in which foster care services are provided, with particular attention afforded to the Ireland's child welfare 'value perspective', an examination which will also highlight key pieces of legislation. The concept of 'permanence' and its connection to foster care placement breakdown will then be explored. The chapter will then analyse previous relevant research on foster care placement breakdown, with an overview of knowledge on why disruption occurs, followed by a presentation of the literature which has focussed on young people's perspectives of the lived experience, meaning and impact of the disruption on their lives. During the course of this chapter, attention will also be drawn to the gaps in the literature. Arising from the exploration of the primary schisms in the literature, the aims of this present study will then be outlined.

The Evolution of Irish Child Welfare Services and State Value Perspective

Foster care services in Ireland have undergone dramatic changes over the past number of decades, instigated by a range of guiding forces including national and international legislation, regulations, policy, and standards, along with political, economic, and social issues (Buckley et al, 1997). One significant change has been the increased demand for the service, triggered by a remarkable rise in the number of children in care in Ireland[1] (HSE, 2011). Coupled with this, both in Ireland and internationally, there has also been significant shift away from the use of residential care in favour of foster care placements (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; CAAB, 2010; HSE, 2011). The dramatic increase in the overall number of children in care, combined with the shift away from residential care, has entailed that foster care is the overwhelmingly dominant placement type, and the demand for foster

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[1] In a twenty one year period from 1990 to 2011, the number of children in care in Ireland more than doubled, rising from 3, 000 to 6,160 (HSE, 2011).

placements is at an unprecedented level[2]. The reliance on foster care, as the most important source of placement for children in out of home care, is set to continue as the HSE plans to have less than 5% of children in care placed in residential homes (HSE, 2011). Therefore, foster care also represents the most important source of long-term alternative care option in Ireland (Gilligan, 1996).

Along with the changes in the nature and demand for foster care, there have also been a wide variety of changes in legislation and policy in Ireland, particular since the 1990s, which has been described as a time of extraordinary series of events in child care policy in Ireland (Buckley et al, 1997). Key legislation and policies currently governing foster care practice in Ireland include the Child Care Act, 1991, the Child Care Regulations, 1995 and the National Standards for Foster Care (2003).

Attempts have been made to bridge the theoretical gap between day-to-day child care practices and state ideologies, mostly notably in the seminal work of Fox-Harding (1997) (Smith, 2005). Fox Harding (1997) proposes that there are four typical value perspectives: laissez faire, state paternalism, birth family defender and children's rights perspective, that states prefer in mediating between the often conflicting and competing needs and rights of the child, the birth family and the foster parents.

The USA and UK are typically seen as adopting a laissez faire perspective, which contends that it is best to leave families largely free of state interference (Kirton, 2009; O' Brien, 2013). In contrast, the state paternalism perspective affords greater weight to the vulnerability of children within the family and supports significantly higher levels of state intervention. The birth family defender perspective contends that state intervention is legitimate, but also focuses on the preservation of the family unit (Fox-Harding, 1997). Finally, the children's rights perspective, which heavily influences child care practices in the Nordic countries (O'Brien, 2013), views the child as an independent person and emphasises his/her voice and participation in planning and decision-making (Fox-Harding, 1997).

Ireland's position within these typologies has been subject to very little academic debate and is therefore not clearly defined. However, it is known that historically, the Irish state has demonstrated passivity towards child care policy and services, and has also exhibited a general hesitance to use its powers (Buckley et al, 1997; Gilligan, 1996). Indeed, Articles 41 and 42 of Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937 (the Irish Constitution), despite frequent critiques, on-going calls for constitutional change

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[2] Currently, the overwhelming majority (90%) of the children in care in Ireland, are placed in foster care (61% general foster care placements and 39% in relative care placements) (HSE, 2011).

perhaps most notably in the Kilkenny Incest Case Inquiry[3] (Mc Guinness, 1993), and a recent Constitutional referendum which was approved by voters, continue to underscore child care law and practice. The Constitution affords a preferential legal weighting to parents, in which they are ascribed with 'inalienable and imperscriptable rights'. This, according to Shannon (2000), confirms Ireland's adoption of a laissez-faire philosophy in respect of parent and child relations.

It has been argued however, that Fox-Harding's (1997) seemingly straightforward framework hides great complexities, and particularly masks states' struggles over the nature and level of service provision to families (Kirton, 2009). Kirton (2009) further argues that these complexities give rise to inconsistencies and contradictions in policy and practice. As highlighted above, many new policies and standards have been introduced in Ireland over the past number of decades. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide a detailed account of all of aspects of Ireland's child welfare services; however some of the key legislation and influential factors, and their connection to Fox Harding's (1997) perspectives, are examined below. Subsequently, conclusions will be drawn on Ireland's current value perspective, according to Fox-Harding's (1997) framework.

Since the foundation of the State in 1922, the aforementioned state inactivity in family life has somewhat dissipated, perhaps most markedly with the introduction of the Child Care Act, 1991. This marked a watershed in child care policy in Ireland, and it remains the primary statute regulating children at risk, or in the care of the State (Buckley et al, 1997). In the most notable move away from a laissez faire typology, under the Child Care Act (CCA), the health boards (now Health Services Executive) were given a statutory duty to promote the welfare of children not receiving adequate care and protection.

However, the CCA not only suggests a move away from a laissez faire perspective, the Act also has an emphasis on family preservation throughout (Gilligan, 1996). This prioritisation of 'family preservation' is best aligned to the modern birth family defender perspective. Indeed, HSE publications since the CCA, (Commission on the Family, 1998; Denyer et al.,1999) demonstrate a strong focus on the importance of family preservation by supporting families and investing in preventative services (HSE, 2011).

Additionally, the CCA also stipulates that the health boards should give due consideration to the wishes of the child, a specification in keeping with the children's rights perspective. Moreover, at a

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[3] The Kilkenny Incest Case Inquiry was an investigation ordered by Minister for Health, Mr Brendan Howlin, in 1993, to examine the circumstances surrounding the continued physical and sexual abuse by a father of his daughter over a fifteen year period, during which the family was known to a number of health care professionals.

similar time to the enactment of the CCA, in 1992, Ireland, without reservation, accepted its international obligations towards children, in ratifying the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Shannon, 2000). Other national documents also suggestive of a children's rights perspective include the National Standards for Foster Care, wherein it is cited that children in state care should have a 'say' (Department for Health and Children, 2003).

Other relatively recent influences on child care policies in Ireland include societal issues, specifically, public pressure for a more effective child protection system, arising from media attention which highlighted the failures of the state, such as in Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse[4] and the Roscommon Child Care Case[5] (Children's Rights Alliance, 2012). Such inquiries have acted as recent remainders of the disadvantages associated with laissez faire ideologies.

To summarise, child welfare services in Ireland are influenced by a myriad of legislation and policies, which, in turn, are shaped by changing economic and social conditions. These policies and legislation do not neatly fit into Fox-Harding's (1997) perspectives, and indeed, it could be argued there are inconsistencies and contradictories between, and even within, these governing pieces of legislation.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to argue against Shannon (2000), and that, in the absence of an amendment to the Constitution, Ireland does not appear to have moved far from the laissez faire perspective. Similarly and recently, O' Brien (2013) suggests that Ireland is closer to 'Boston than Berlin', specifically, that Ireland leans towards a laissez faire perspective, rather than a children's rights viewpoint. Indeed, in keeping with O' Brien's (2013) assertions, recent consultation and forums held with children in care in Ireland (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011; EPIC, 2010) have suggested that young people in state care do not feel listened to.

In terms of the future, the signing of the amendment to the Constitution into law has been delayed by a legal challenge brought in the High Court, should this challenge be rejected, legally, children's rights should be strengthened. However, it remains to be seen whether this will results in child care policy and crucially, practices, embracing a stronger adherence to the children's rights perspective.

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[4] The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse , commonly referred to as the 'Ryan Report', was one of a range of measures introduced by the Irish Government to investigate the extent and effects of all forms of child abuse in Irish institutions from 1936 onwards.
[5] The Roscommon Child Care Inquiry was an investigation conducted by Norah Gibbons, which examined the circumstances surrounding the continued neglect abuse by parents of their six children, and the Health Services failure to protect them.

Permanence, Stability and Placement Breakdown

The concept of permanence has been central to debates on social work with children and a key goal for many child welfare systems for nearly forty years (Biehal, 2012). Permanency Planning has been defined as "a philosophy highlighting the value of rearing children in a family setting, preferably their biological families, a theoretical framework stressing that stability and continuity of relationships promote children's growth and functioning" (Fein et al 1983: 197).

Moreover, permanency planning is intended to provide legal, physical and emotional stability for every child (Biehal, 2012). There has however been a particular emphasis, both in the literature and in practice, on the search for physical permanence, namely a stable, long-term placement for a child (Biehal, 2012). The concept of permanence, and especially physical permanence, is entangled, and often used interchangeably with, the concept of 'stability' and is therefore inextricably linked to placement breakdown. Indeed, it has been recognised that "the reduction of placement breakdowns is a crucial issue for policies designed to increase permanence" (Sinclair et al, 2005: 239), and in this respect, placement breakdown is antithetical to the concept of 'physical permanence'.

The aim for permanency is enshrined in legislation in many international countries, including the USA (Adoption and Safe Families Act, 1997), in Australia (Children and Young Persons Amendment, 2001), and is also a key policy objective in other countries, such as the UK, (Department for Education, 2012). Although the concept of 'permanence' has not disseminated Irish child care services to the same extent as our Western counterparts, the promotion of stability and prevention of placement breakdown is a clear objective of the HSE (HSE, 2011; HIQA, 2013).

Notwithstanding the dominance of the concept of permanency, there have been some critiques of an over reliance on such a philosophy, with calls that permanence has 'gone too far' (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Gilligan, 1997). It has been argued that, with permanency as the governing paradigm of child care practice and policy, there is an over emphasis on 'means rather than ends' (Gilligan, 1997). The ultimate concern is that the strive for physical permanence may impose placement stability prematurely and/or incorrectly (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004). Neither Gilligan (1997) nor Barber and Delfabbro (2004) suggest that placement stability is an unworthy objective; however, they warn against 'permanence at all costs' and highlight that a placement move, planned or otherwise is, at times, preferable for the child (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004).

Notwithstanding the critiques of an over-reliance on permanency planning, it is widely accepted that instability in care can be harmful to child development, potentially resulting in increased difficulties in forming attachments, problems with regulating emotions and a poor self-concept (Barber and

Delfabbro, 2004; Rubin et al, 2007; Sinclair et al, 2005; Strijker et al, 2002). Thus, the importance of placement stability for young people in care is well documented in the literature (Rubin et al, 2007). Placement stability however, is frequently not achieved, with studies reporting placement breakdown prevalence rates ranging from 20% (Minty, 1999) to 47% (Wilson et al, 2000). There are a wide variety of reasons, positive and negative, why children in care are not provided with stable and long lasting placements. Positive moves can include reunification with birth family and a move from a short to a long-term placement. Another reason, and one which is widely regarded as negative, due to its often harmful effects to the child, is placement breakdown (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Daly, 2011; Daly and Gilligan, 2005; Darmody et al, 2013; Rubin el al, 2007).

Predicting Placement Breakdown

In light of the prevalence and known negative outcomes associated with placement breakdown, much of the literature on disruption has focused on examining risk and protective factors associated with breakdown. Given this focus, the vast majority of the studies on this topic have adopted quantitative approaches (Unrau, 2007). Additionally, Oosterman et al (2007) argue that many of these studies have been undermined by an over-reliance on simplistic univariate designs. A further critique of this body of literature has been of the choice of key informants; with young people with care experience remarkably under-represented in such research (Unrau, 2007).

Within an Irish context, despite young people themselves highlighting that placement breakdown is a major issue of care (Department and Children and Youth Affairs, 2011) there is a dearth of research, of any methodological persuasion, on foster care breakdown. An exception is Lally (1991), and in keeping with international trends, this study identified salient factors associated with breakdown. Given the international wealth of information on the contributing factors of placement disruption, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide an overview of all this literature. What follows is a review of selected literature of the factors associated with placement breakdown, according to three broad categories; child related factors, foster care environment and external factors.

<u>Child-Related Factors:</u>

There is an overwhelming consensus within the literature that older children who are placed in foster care later in their development are at a higher risk of experiencing placement breakdown (Barber et al, 2001, Berridge & Cleaver, 1987, Leslie et al, 2005 and Sinclair et al, 2005). It is also very well documented that children who present with behavioural[6] or psychiatric difficulties are more likely to experience placement breakdown (Baum et al, 2001; Brown & Bedner, 2006; Denby et al, 1999; Gries et al, 2000; Heller et al, 2002; Laan et al, 2001; Leslie et al, 2005; Nissim, 1996; Sinclair et al, 2005; Thompson et al, 1994). Most recently, Oosterman et al (2007)'s meta-analysis of placement breakdown also lends support to this assertion, as they found that, when all other risk factors related to the child were controlled for, behaviour problems remained the strongest predictor of placement breakdown.

The experience of one placement breakdown has also been analysed as a risk factor for predicting the likelihood of a future disruption. There have been some conflicting findings, with Fratter et al (1991) concluding that, when other variables associated with placement breakdown were controlled for, a previous experience of disruption was not associated with a further breakdown. In contrast, several other studies have found that a relationship does exist between the two variables, with the experience of one breakdown increasing the risk of future disruption (Kagan & Reid, 1986; McDonald et al, 1996; Napier, 1972). Similarly, Rich (1996) found that the harmful effects caused by placement breakdown, form part of a self-perpetuating cycle which jeopardise future placement stability.

Additionally, research also suggests that the child in care is often the instigator of placement breakdown (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Sallanas et al, 2004). In support of this, Sinclair et al (2005) found that the child's motivation was important, with those children who were perceived by their carer givers as 'wanting' to be in their placements, more likely to succeed in them.

<u>Foster Care Environment:</u>

The foster family's own resources and life events has been found to have a bearing on placement stability. Additional stresses, demands and foster family life events and changes, such as their health status, marital difficulties and caring for aging parents are associated with disruption (Brown & Bednar, 2006; Buehler et al, 2003; Lally, 1991; Terling-Watt, 2001).

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[6] Common behavioural problems include: refusal to follow house rules, lying, running away and stealing

The presence and role of foster carer's own birth children has been given increasing attention within the literature, and has been found to have a strong association with placement breakdown (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987; Kalland & Sinkkonen, 2001; Sinclair et al, 2005; Wilson et al, 2000). As far back as thirty years ago, it was found that placing young children with families who have birth children carries a risk for placement permanency (Zwimpfer, 1983). Placement breakdown is more likely when birth children are not feeling supported (Martin, 1993; Triseliotis, 1989; Twigg, 1995), and when they feel that their concerns are unimportant and their contribution is unrecognised by the agency (Swan, 2002). Interestingly, Kalland and Sinkkonen (2001) found that placing a child in an infertile family carried the lowest risk for a breakdown, independent of whether or not the family had other foster/adopted children.

Broader than the child's relationship with the foster carer's birth children, there is a considerable body of literature that supports the importance of the overall fit/match between the foster child, foster parents and birth children in a home in the success of a placement (Berridge, 1997; Doelling & Johnson, 1990; Nissim, 1996; Sellick & Thoburn, 1996, and Stovall & Dozier, 1998).

The quality of the relationship that develops between the foster care family and the child in care has also been afforded some attention in the literature. There have been some conflicting findings however, with some studies identifying an association between the relationship between the child and foster carers (Doelling & Johnson, 1990), and others not failing to confirm this association (Oosterman et al, 2007). However, there is consistency in the literature in that the quality of relationship between children in care and members of the foster family has a considerable impact on the child's outcomes after care (Schofield 2002; Chapmen et al, 2004).

External Factors:

Two other major factors found to have a bearing on placement stability include the role of the child's birth family and the availability of support. In terms of the former, Brown & Bednar (2006) and Jones & Morissette (1999) found that the role of the child's birth family has an impact on the stability of the placement. Markedly, Terling-Watt (2001) identified that the continued influence of birth parents was the most common problem contributing to placement disruption. Oosterman et al (2007) also found that the less contact children had with their birth parents, the more likely their placement was to succeed. Notwithstanding this, the same study also found that a co-operative relationship between foster and birth parents enhances placement stability for children (Oosterman et al, 2007). This finding is supported by several other studies (two of which also using multi-variate

analysis), which consider close contact between parents and the child in care to be a protective factor (Berridge and Cleaver, 1987; Fratter et al 1991; Millham et al 1986).

As highlighted above, a lack of support, particularly from social work services, has been cited as a reason for placement breakdown. The literature highlights that the relationship between the foster child, foster family and the social worker becomes more critical when a placement is experiencing severe difficulties, and is 'at risk' of breakdown (Berrick, 1997; Scannapieco & Hegar, 2002, Seaberg & Harrigan, 1999; Wilson et al, 2000).

Beyond Sterile Indicators: The Experience of Placement Breakdown

As highlighted above, the vast majority of the literature on foster care placement breakdown has been dedicated to identifying the predictors of breakdown. Some of these studies have also made reference to the cost of disruption; for example, Brown and Bednar (2006) note that "foster children, foster families and the child protection system feel the effect of placement breakdown" (Brown and Bednar, 2006:1498). Notwithstanding the wealth of research exploring risk and protective factors, few studies have gone beyond examining what Barber and Delfabbro (2004) refer to as the 'sterile indicators' of placement breakdown and little is therefore known about the lived experience of placement disruption for those mostly closely involved in it (Rostill-Brookes et al, 2011).

Of the studies that have examined the experience and meaning of placement breakdown, the majority have done so from the foster carers' perspective. Several studies have demonstrated that foster carers pay a high emotional cost, often harbouring feelings of doubt, pain, regret, grief, and a deep sense of loss and self-recrimination for several years following a placement breakdown (Aldgate & Hawley, 1986; Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Berridge & Cleaver, 1987; Butler & Charles, 1999; Lally, 1991; Riggs and Willsmore, 2012; Rostill-Brookes et al, 2011; Wilson et al, 2000).

There is a long-standing and widespread recognition of the importance of including young people with care experience in research (Curran & Pecora, 1999; Gilbertson & Barber, 2002; Gilligan, 2000). Nevertheless, their voice remains underrepresented in all research on out of home care, as including them is laden with multiple barriers (Gilbertson and Barber, 2002). As such, the 'primary consumers' of out of home care (Wilson & Conroy, 1999), namely the children and young people, have not been widely consulted.

Unrau (2007) identified that this gap is wider still in relation to the topic of placement instability, as most studies have failed to elucidate the quality and meaning of the 'move experience' for children in care. Similarly, this researcher found less than ten research studies focused on breakdowns or instability in care, which had the 'primary consumers' of out of home care, as participants. Generally these studies have adopted qualitative paradigms, and although they have all privileged the 'voice' of the young person, the majority have also included foster carers' and/or social workers' perspectives. Methodologically, these studies have generally had small sample sizes, particularly with regard to the number of participating young people (Unrau et al, 2008). What follows is an overview of the insights that can be gleaned from the perspectives of young people who have shared their experience of placement breakdown.

Influences on Placement Breakdown:

The available literature, particularly Rostill- Brookes' et al (2011) multi- perspectival study with five young people (along with a focus group with foster carers and interviews with four social workers), offers some insight into young people's perceptions of why a placement ended prematurely. This study found that blame and recrimination were dominant themes for young people, with foster carers positioned most prominently as the active agents in the breakdown of placements (Rostill-Brookes et al, 2011). Social workers were also recriminated in light of poor communication and social work services were also held responsible due to the lack of available placements (Rostill-Brookes et al, 2011).

The existing literature is divided in terms of young people's narratives of their own role in the breakdown process. For example, Rostill-Brookes et al (2011) found that young people underplayed this, a fact viewed as unsurprising, given Hughes' (1997) suggestion that it is not uncommon for children in care to deny responsibility. In contrast, Barber and Delfabbro (2004) found that young people had realistic views of their role and responsibilities in the ending of placements.

Two other key influences on placement stability have emerged from the available studies, the child's relationship with foster carers' birth children and the role of the child's birth family. With regard to the former, as highlighted above, the young people's relationship with the foster carer's birth child has been given attention within the quantitative research to date. However, it has also emerged as a prominent and recurring theme in several of studies with young people (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Butler and Charles, 1999). At times, the young people depicted their relationships with foster

carers' birth children as positive, valued and a "non-threatening source of acceptance, affection and nurturance" (Butler and Charles, 1999: 16). On other occasions, the foster sibling relationship was damaging to the young people, with birth children actively excluding and behaving unkindly to the child in care (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004).

There is consistency amongst these studies in that young people frequently felt that they were treated and judged differently than the foster family's birth children. The available literature highlights that young people had a sense of injustice, in that birth children, particularly younger children, were seen as 'doing no wrong' and their version of events was always accepted as truth (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004). This according to Butler and Charles (1999) demonstrates foster carers' 'hierarchy of value'. The studies also suggest that young peoples' position as 'children in care', who also have corporate parents, also underlines their sense of differentiation (Butler and Charles, 1999).

In keeping with the findings of the quantitative study, the very nature of foster carer has emerged as influential to young peoples' experience of foster placements. Butler and Charles' (1999) small scale exploratory study with eleven participants (nine foster carers and two young people), offers a unique insight into the reality of family life in foster care by shedding light on the conflicts faced by children in care, given their 'particular position' (Sinclair et al, 2005), namely the fact that they have two families.

The literature suggests that despite often wanting to, it is a particular challenge for children in foster care to have a sense of belonging to both families in significant ways (Fernandez, 2007; Sinclair et al, 2005). Similarly, Butler and Charles (1999) found that young people displayed a natural desire to maintain existing family and social networks, and they often viewed substitute care as 'second best', thus creating a situation in which "foster care was always the past, the present, but never the future" (Butler and Charles, 1999: 13). Butler and Charles (1999) identified two additional barriers affecting placement breakdown; young people's perception of fostering as a job and also foster parents emotional struggle to accept the young person wanting to have both families. In terms of the latter, Butler and Charles (1999) found that most foster carers viewed birth families as a hindrance, unhelpful and problematic, blocking young people's capacity to 'better themselves", with young people often having to choose between their foster and birth families, a choice frequently connected to placement breakdown (Butler and Charles, 1999).

Positively, these studies suggest that for those, albeit a minority, who had experienced a situation truly inclusive of both sets of parents, the foster parents maintained strong physical and/or

conceptual link with their birth families (Butler and Charles, 1999) and they were not competitive towards their birth families (Sinclair et al, 2005).

Some of the studies, most notably Sinclair et al's (2005) survey with 150 children in foster care in the UK, have shed light on what children want from foster care placement. Very simply, Sinclair et al (2005), found that children want care, concern and encouragement from their foster families; they want to feel that they belong and not like the 'odd one out'. The value of having a transition period into a placement has also been identified as positive and necessary by young people, who specifically named that they want a one month trial for all placements, or at a minimum, to meet prospective carers prior to a placement (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Sinclair et al, 2005).

The Lived Experience and Meaning of Placement Breakdown:

A number of studies indicate that young people have mixed views of placements that were disrupted, and similarly, both positive and negative feelings about their ending (Barber & Delfabbro, 2004; Butler & Charles, 1999; Rostill-Brookes et al, 2011; Unrau et al, 2008). Of those that have had negative placement experience, child maltreatment has emerged as a recurring theme (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004). The literature suggests that, in light of such accounts, some young people were vehemently negative about the placement, and welcomed its ending, expressing feelings of relief and joy (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004). However, other studies suggest that some young people reflect positively on disrupted placements, or at a minimum, recall specific positive aspects of these placements (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Butler and Charles, 1999; Unrau et al, 2008). Indeed, the existing literature suggests that those who regretted the end of their placements expressed negative feelings about their endings, such as shock, fear, worry and sadness (Rostill - Brookes et al, 2011).

Irrespective of placement satisfaction, the available research suggests that it is very commonplace for young people to express some level of distress about the breakdown, as it has often proved to be an unhappy and anxiety provoking experience for young people (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Unrau et al, 2008; Rostill-Brookes et al, 2011).

A number of studies have offered some insight into the young people's experience during times of placement breakdown, and in particular, have highlighted the failure to involve young people in decisions made about their lives (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Rostill-Brookes et al, 2011; Sinclair et al, 2005). The studies indicate that frequently, children are not aware of difficulties in their

placement prior to termination and were often moved from their placements without notice (Barber & Delfabbro, 2004). Rostill- Brookes et al (2011) found that this position of not knowing intensified young people's vulnerability and powerlessness, which left them feeling bewildered and disempowered (Sinclair et al, 2005).

A topic yet to be fully researched is young peoples' communication with others at the time of placement breakdown. Barber and Delfabbro's (2004) qualitative interviews with 13 young people (aged 10- 15 years), who had experienced at least one disruption due to their problematic behaviour, provide some insight into young people's communication around the matter of placement breakdown. Barber and Delfabbro (2004) found that, some young people, particularly those who were unhappy in their placement, had discussed their concerns with third parties, including their social worker. However a dominant feature to emerge was that the young people's views appear not to be listened to, or acted upon (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004), with many experiencing a long wait before another placement was identified. This study found that, as an anecdote to this, some of the young people no longer discussed placement difficulties and, instead, deliberately engaged in behaviour intended to bring the placement to an end (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004). For those who did not communicate their concerns with third parties, Barber and Delfabbro (2004) found that common explanations provided by the young people were that it was a futile exercise with perceptions that social workers were not interested, or that no alternative placements were available.

The existing, although limited, research indicates that placement breakdown leaves a lasting and deleterious impression on young people (Rostill-Brookes et al, 2011; Fernandez, 2007; Unrau et al, 2008). The American study conducted by Unrau et al (2008), in which 22 adults with a history of foster care were interviewed about their experiences of multiple placement moves, provides particular insights into young peoples' direct accounts of the impact of disruption. A key finding from this study was that placement breakdown was a time when the young person shut down emotionally (Unrau et al, 2008). This finding is supported in Rostill- Brookes' (2011) study, in which young people were found to use techniques of avoidance, distraction or minimisation to cope with their emotional reactions to unexpected transitions. The available literature offers differing explanations of why young people 'shut down', with Unrau et al (2008) suggesting that young people's attempts to communicate their feelings are misunderstand or ignored, while conversely, Rostill- Brookes et al (2011) argue that child are astute at disguising their feelings which consequentially entails that those involved underestimate how difficult the experience is for them.

In addition, Unrau et al (2008) argue that disruption exposes 'already damaged' young people to repeated levels of distress, which can have a detrimental impact on their ability to form relationships, regulate emotions and process information in adulthood. Indeed, some researchers have aligned the potential long-term impact of multiple placement breakdowns on young people with a framework of complex trauma (Van der Kolt, 2005). Indeed, there are many theoretical perspectives pertinent to the impact of placement breakdown, including attachment theory, grief and loss theory and resilience theory. With regard to the former, there is a vast body of literature on attachment theory, and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore this in any great detail. However, the following findings are noteworthy: it is widely accepted that children's opportunity to develop a secure attachment is grossly disrupted when they are received into care, moreover, Fernandez (2007) posits that this occurs again at times of placement disruption. More generally, Butler and Charles (1999) found that young people who experience breakdown have difficulties forming relationships with new carers, which can jeopardise subsequent placements.

There is a well-established theoretical body of knowledge of grief and loss, most of which has considered death-related loss. However, some theorists, particularly Thompson (2002) have extended the understanding of loss and grief, by exploring other sources of loss, such as that felt by children in care. Indeed, a majority of this discussion has solely focussed on the losses experienced when the child is initially received into care (Murphy and Jenkinson, 2012). Yet, Unrau et al (2008) highlight that placement breakdown is another time of profound loss for young people and that this loss is felt in various forms including loss of power over personal destiny, personal belongings, loss of siblings, self-esteem, and loss of normalcy. The loss of friends and connections, in particular, has been a recurring feature in the available studies (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Rostill- Brookes et al, 2011; Unrau et al, 2008).

Resilience has been described as normal development under difficult and adverse circumstances (Gilligan, 1997). From a resilience-based perspective, a placement breakdown acts as an additional experience of adversity for young people in care (Fernandez, 2007). In an Australian mixed methods longitudinal study, Fernandez (2007) found loss of self-esteem, and subsequently, self- evolution were associated with placement breakdown. These losses are particularly concerning from a resilience based perspective, as they are regarded as key 'building blocks' in the development of resilience (Gilligan, 1997).

The above studies offer an invaluable contribution to the knowledge of the young people's experience of placement breakdown, and have shed much needed light on, and added a new

dimension to, the extensive body of literature on young people's experiences of placement breakdown. Nonetheless, there remains a paucity of research on the topic of placement breakdown which privileges the young peoples' perspective, and further, there are methodological limitations associated with the existing studies.

By adopting an in –depth, comprehensive, individualised approach, the researcher hopes to redress some of these gaps. As highlighted above, there are a variety of reasons for care instability, however given its high prevalence rates, this dissertation will primarily focus on instability caused by placement breakdown. This study will honour 'lived experience' as the source of expert knowledge, and to circumvent diluting the young people' accounts, they will be the only informants.

The study seeks, not just to garner narratives of young people's perceptions of why placements breakdown, but also to uncover influences, issues and dynamics which affect the full course of foster placements, and therefore are prone to remain hidden when quantitative and less in-depth approaches are used. This study also seeks to build upon the limited research which has explored the experience of placement breakdown, and to gain an insight in the meanings and impact that Irish young people attach to this experience.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed several issues that are salient to contextualising this qualitative in-depth study of young peoples' experiences of foster care placement breakdown in Ireland. A brief overview of the evolution of child care services in Ireland, with particular attention to the state's ideological and value perspective, along with the concept of permanence, was presented. This chapter also outlined some of the well-known indicators of placement breakdown, overwhelmingly derived from quantitative studies which have had foster carers and social worker as the key informants. Subsequently, knowledge that can be gleaned from the perspectives of the young people who have shared their experience of placement disruption was then examined. Finally, the direction and aims of this study were presented.

Chapter two outlines the methodological approach adopted in the conduct of this qualitative study of young people with placement breakdown experience.

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Introduction

As stated in the introduction, this research study is concerned with exploring young people's experience of foster care placement breakdown. In this chapter, an overview of the research design and methods of data collection and analysis will be presented. Particular attention will be paid to the benefits and challenges associated with the conduct of qualitative research with young people on sensitive topics. The ethical considerations and challenges which arose during the course of the study will also be discussed.

The Study

In its broadest terms, the research aimed to generate an in-depth understanding of young people's experience of placement breakdown. Conceptualising 'breakdown' as an experience, rather than an event, reflects a greater sensitivity to what is a highly intimate and emotive reality for many children living in out of home care. To redress the gaps in knowledge, the current study aimed to add a new dimension to the substantial body of literature on why placements end prematurely and to build upon the limited knowledge on young peoples' experiences of placement breakdown. Thus the secondary aims of this study are to:

1) examine young person's explanations and narratives of the immediate precursor to placement breakdown

2) explore broader influences, issues and dynamics at play throughout the full course of the placement, which impact upon placement stability and can ultimately led to breakdown

3) explore young people's experiences at the time of placement breakdown and the meaning and impact they attach to this experience

4) highlight implications and recommendations for social work practice with children in foster care

Research Design and Approach

In light of the dearth of research on the topic of foster care placement breakdown with young people as the key informants, this study was exploratory in design, as it set out to examine 'what was going on here' (Schutt, 2006).

Given the researcher's position as a social worker in Children and Families Services, she was aware anecdotally that foster care placement breakdown is a major issue in the care system, and one which often can have harmful consequences for all involved. Therefore, from the outset, the researcher had a keen interest in conducting an empirical study on the topic of placement breakdown. Previous quantitative research on the topic, such as that conducted by Sallanas et al (2004), describe breakdown as a complex phenomenon. This level of complexity, coupled with the sensitive nature of the topic, meant that a qualitative approach was best suited to the aim of capturing the 'experience' of breakdown. The merits of a qualitative approach align with this study's research objectives; as such an approach allows the researcher to delve into important personal issues, to elicit meanings, to understand experiences and to re-construct events (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

As highlighted above, there is an absence of studies generally which include children with care experience in research. Indeed, the gap is such to an extent that it was warranted study in and of itself. In examining the obstacles to involving children in foster care in research, Gilbertson & Barber (2002) found that there was a vast exclusion of 'troubled' children with care experience in research and they posited that "those who are possibly not being well served by alternative care and who are likely to have the most to contribute to alternative care research are denied or declined the opportunity to participate" (Gilberston & Barber, 2002: 257). Young people with placement breakdown experience can be categorised as 'not being well-served by alternative care', thus, they would be described as a particularly 'hard-to-reach' group (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). Such hidden groups are often obscured from the view of social researchers and consequentially there can be considerable barriers to accessing negotiation. Moreover, research involving young people with both care, and placement breakdown experience, given their 'vulnerable' status, would be described as sensitive in nature (Renzetti & Raymond, 1993). In light of the above, the researcher was aware from the outset that the conduct of the research with young people as the key informants could raise of a range of ethical and methodological challenges (Fernandez, 2007).

However, persuasive arguments for including young people in, or with care experience in research, have been made, for example, Gilligan (2000) has argued that there are pragmatic, therapeutic,

ethical, philosophical, management and legal reasons to listen to young people with care experience. Moreover, the few studies which have privileged the voice of young people suggest that it has added an important dimension to knowledge on the topic (Fernandez, 2007).

In summary, while fully appreciating the potential barriers and sensitivities, ultimately the researcher was compelled by the reasons *for* including young people. The researcher decided that the aforementioned potential barriers and sensitivities would *not prevent* the use of young people as participants; rather it would shape how the study was conducted.

Data Collection: In-depth Interviewing

In line with this study's focus on personal accounts, the core data collection method utilised in this study was individual interviews (Bryman, 2001). This study adopted the most commonly used individual interview type, the in-depth interview, a data collection technique which allows the researcher to explore fully all the factors that underpin participants' answers, be they reasons, feelings, opinions and beliefs (Legard et al, 2003). A particularly salient advantage of the in-depth interview is that it allows for flexibility in structure and content of the interview and facilitates the exploration of circumstances and experiences in a way that is responsive to the young people's accounts (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For example, it allows for phrasing and sequencing to vary from interview to interview. The researcher expected that the young people would present in a variety of ways, some engaging and forthcoming with information, some hesitant and reluctant, along with varying experiences, accounts and perspectives. Therefore, a significant merit of the in-depth interview in this study is that it allows the researcher to follow the direction that each respondent takes during the interview.

The researcher hoped that the data gathered through a combination of having young people as the key informants, along with their accounts being facilitated through in-depth qualitative interviews, would offer an important experiential dimension to the existing research which has been critiqued for focussing on sterile indictors of placement disruption and consequentially de- contextualising the experience.

Recruitment, Eligibility and Sampling

As outlined above, historically researchers have experienced strong barriers to negotiating access to children and young people with care experience (Gilberston & Barber, 2002 and Daly & Gilligan, 2005). Given that this study sought to interview young people only, access negotiation was a pivotal issue[7] and the role of the gatekeepers proved crucial to this research project (Denscombe, 2007).

The researcher identified four gatekeepers, from two agencies, EPIC[8] service and HSE Aftercare workers. Two gatekeepers were known to the researcher prior to the study, and the researcher used a snowballing sampling strategy to make contact with the final two gatekeepers, who were identified via the introduction and recommendation of the previously used gatekeepers (Robson, 2002). All four gatekeepers were extremely helpful; they were the mechanism through which participants were nominated and they also facilitated initial introductions to young people who they felt may be interested in participating in the research. The gatekeepers were given Information Sheets (see Appendix 1) which provided an overview of the topic under study and eligibility criteria for participation.

The gatekeepers were requested to identify possible research participants who met the eligibility criteria, which was, young people: 1) over the age of 18 years; 2) with a history of being in care and; 3) who had experienced at least one foster care placement breakdown. In other words, a purposeful sampling strategy was used whereby young people were "chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles" (Ritchie et al., 2003: 78). Insofar as was possible, the researcher sought to achieve diversity in respect of gender, location and current circumstances. For the purposes of this study, foster care placement breakdown was defined as the "unanticipated and untimely placement ending that is not included in the child's care plan" (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987).

Gatekeepers were also provided with an Information Sheet which was designed specifically for the young person (Appendix 2), and were asked to distribute this to prospective participants prior to meeting with the researcher. In all, ten young people were nominated as prospective participants by

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[7] Given the well documented difficulties in accessing young people, a contingency plan was developed, in that if less than six young people are recruited for the study, the young people's interviews would be supplemented by interviews with experienced social workers who have worked with young people during placement breakdown.

[8] EPIC- Empowering Young People in Care is an independent, not for profit, organisation in Ireland, whose purpose is to advocate for the rights of young people in care or with care experience.

the four different gatekeepers. Three young people nominated were not interested in taking part, and another one young person did not meet the eligibility criteria. Ultimately, a total of six interviews were conducted with young people, over the age of 18 years, who had care experience and an experience of at least one placement breakdown.

The Interview

The six interviews were conducted during June and July 2013 in a variety of settings, including a hotel lobby and open spaces in Trinity College Dublin; however, the majority took place in a private room in the particular gatekeeper's workplace. The interviews varied in length, ranging from 35 to 90 minutes, with most lasting approximately 50 minutes. All participants received a gift card for a department store to the value of €10, as a token of appreciation for their time and effort.

The interviews were guided by an interview schedule (Appendix 3), which drew on issues highlighted in both the quantitative and qualitative literature. The guide was a semi-structured in nature, with a focus on the use of probes and primarily open-ended questioning to achieve depth in responses in relation to the key interview topics[9] (Legard et al, 2003). The order of topics was not rigidly adhered to and, in this respect, the interview guide acted more as a reference point. Elements of an inductive approach and grounded theory (Glasser and Strauss, 1967) were also used, as the interview guide was reviewed and slightly adapted in accordance with the emergent findings from the initial two interviews. In this respect, the study provided the opportunity for young people to 'set the agenda' (Bryman, 2001).

In light of the age and backgrounds of the participants, and in keeping with the perspective that conversation generated in interview context is jointly constructed, the interview itself was purposely informal in style (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002; Holstein and Gubrium, 1997). As well as the use of open-ended questions, a more visual and interactional method of data collection was also used during interviews, as participants were requested to assist the researcher in completing a 'Placement History Timeline' (Appendix 4). Such techniques have been used previously in research with children and young people in state care (Biehal, 2012). The placement timeline recorded the

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[9] The key topics were: the nature of the relationship developed by young people with all members of the foster family, the role of the young person's birth family in the lives of the young person during placement breakdown, the use and impact of respite, the role and influence of the legislative context on the young person's ability and opportunity to settle and positive and supportive services/people in the young persons' life.

participants' placements during their lives in care. Generally, this was used as the opening to discussing their overall time in care, and acted as a very useful framework to gather factual information, such as the age of reception into care and the length of time in various placements etc. It also proved to be a valuable reference point not only for the researcher, but also for the young people. For example, in many interviews the young people specifically returned to the timeline when discussing a placement, stating "that was when I was here" while gesturing to the 'timeline'. In this respect, the placement timeline offered an interactional dimension to the interviews, and appeared to aid the interviews' informal style.

Prior to the conduct of the interviews, the researcher was concerned that her position as a social worker in may discourage prospective participants from partaking, or serve to dilute young people's criticism of the service by providing socially desirable responses. This potential issue was managed by ensuring that all prospective research participants were aware of the researcher's role in advance of agreeing to partake in the interview. Moreover, the researchers position as a social worker, and the fact that their participation was entirely voluntary, were both re-iterated at introduction stages. Additionally, assurances of confidentially and anonymity were emphasised.

Overall, the young people presented as open, engaging and forthcoming with information. An exception was one young person who appeared closed and somewhat uneasy during the interview. In contrast, this participant appeared very willing to partake in the study and both prior to, and following, the interview, she was extremely engaging with the researcher. During the interview, this participant named that she had never discussed the breakdown, which possibly accounted for her reticence during the interview. Notwithstanding this particular participants' apparent reserve, all of the young people appeared to value the opportunity to provide their complete accounts of their experiences, in an uninterrupted way. Indeed, young people's appreciation of having their 'voice' listened to was specifically named in feedback from a gatekeeper, which appears in keeping to Whiting's (2000) assertion that listening to foster children shows respect for them and acknowledges their individuality.

Data Management and Analysis

Five of the six interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. One young person refused to allow the recording, which is not an uncommon occurrence in the conduct of sensitive

research (Renzetti & Raymond, 1993). In this case, the participant stated that he was uncomfortable with the recorder and, instead, the researcher took detailed notes, which were typed immediately after the interview. The transcribed data was stored, with no identifying information, on a password protected computer.

Transcripts were then coded manually in accordance with coding 'categories', which sought to reflect the research aims (Appendix 5). Following the development of codebooks, the analytical strategy was undertaken. This involved cross-sectional analysis, whereby key themes were extracted and accounts were compared across the data set (Bryman, 2001). The views and experiences that arose were then considered in respect of the literature already available. Although not a narrative analysis, in the coding and development of themes, particular attention was paid to the 'plots' of the narratives, and how they were constructed (Riessman, 1993).

Ethical Considerations

"Social researchers should be ethical in the collection of their data, in the process of analysing the data and in the dissemination of the findings" (Denscombe, 2007: 141). Initially, ethical approval for the conduct of the study was attained from the Research Ethical Approval Committee, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin.

To ensure all young people were able to provide consent independently, the study only included individuals over 18 years of age. Notwithstanding this, principles of best practice when researching with minors informed the research process (Mahon et al, 1996). Notably, the vulnerability of those young people targeted for participation during the research was recognised, as was the potential of the interviews to raise distressing topics for the participants. In keeping with recommended practices in social research (Byrman, 2001), information sheets provided to all participants included a detailed explanation of the purpose of the research, an account of what participation involved, the anticipated time commitment and the content of the interview. Subsequently, voluntary, informed written consent was sought and attained from every participant. The researcher was cognisant that all information, written or verbal, was easily accessible to the participants, in that clear, comprehensible language, was used at all times.

As highlighted above, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were provided and it was specifically noted that no information would be passed on to gatekeepers, social workers or foster carers. As recommended by Mahon et al (1996) participants were informed of the procedures if confidentiality needed to be breached.

Throughout the course of conduct of this study, every effort was made to minimise any possibility of upset for the participants. At the outset, before commencing the interview, the researcher allowed time for rapport building. Additionally, the format of the questions was given careful consideration, with neutral questions asked before more personal, sensitive questions. If respondents presented as upset, or unwilling to discuss an issue during the interview, the researcher was attuned and responsive to this and did not probe for more information[10]. Furthermore, all research participants were provided with a detailed list of support services at the end of the interview (Appendix 6).

The use of aftercare workers/Epic worker was a potential ethical issue in this study and the researcher was aware of the risk that some young people may feel obliged to partake. To circumvent this, in fieldwork it was highlighted, not only in the young person's information sheet, but also verbally by the researcher, that participation was entirely voluntary and not obligatory. In actuality, the researcher considered that along with being crucial to negotiation access (Denscombe, 2007), the gatekeepers also positively contributed to this study's sensitive and ethical conduct. The researcher worked closely with the gatekeepers, which entailed that from the outset, only those young people who were deemed, by the gatekeeper, as emotionally willing and capable to partake were nominated. Additionally, the gatekeepers also acted as a support to the young people following the interview.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations associated with this research study. Given that the restricted timescale of this dissertation did not allow for further recruitment, the key limitation of this study is the particularly small sample size. Although only six young people were interviewed, this study draws on narratives of ten experiences of placement breakdowns, and moreover, overall the study garnered very rich, and highly personalised, narratives. Nonetheless, given the use of a qualitative

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[10] As discussed above, one young person presented as closed and somewhat uneasy during the interview, therefore the research was particularly sensitive to this, she followed the participants led and did not probe for further information. This is reflected in the interview time, which was just 35 minutes.

paradigm, and the particularly small sample size, the findings are tentative and the study does not seek to be representative (Babbie, 2004).

As highlighted above, a possible concern and therefore, limitation, of this study related to the researcher's position as a social worker. Along with a concern that participants may provide socially desirable responses, there was a risk that potential participants may have been clients of the researcher in the past. To circumvent this, all prospective participants were provided with the name of the researcher in advance of the study and none were former clients of the researcher. Although the impact of the researcher's background on the narratives garnered cannot be entirely clear, it did not appear to minimise the young people's critique of social workers or the service in general, an issue which is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Another key limitation of this study is that like, much of the research on foster care from the child's perspective, it is retrospective in nature, with all of the participants recalling experiences of placement breakdown. Although some experiences of breakdown had occurred relatively recently[11], overall, that the narratives are not contemporaneous. Contemporaneous narratives are particularly well-regarded as it has been argued that "hearing foster children describe their lives while they experience them is important" (Whiting and Lee, 2003: 288). Nevertheless, a majority of the young people could vividly recall experiences of the placement breakdown and provided rich detailed narratives of these experiences.

Conclusion

This Chapter has presented an overview of the study's key methodological issues, namely the aims of the research and a description of how the researcher sought to answer the key research questions. The following chapter will outline the findings of this study.

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[11] Three of the ten experiences of placement breakdown had occurred within a eighteen month period prior to the interview

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Introduction

As highlighted in previous chapters, this study is primarily concerned with exploring and understanding young people's experience of care placement breakdown. This chapter will first present the profile of the sample. Data will then be offered on the participants' care histories. For ease of readership, this data, including the age at which participants first entered care, the total number of care placements experienced, and the number of foster carer placement breakdowns reported, will first be presented in a table, and then discussed. Details on the participants' current circumstances, including living arrangements and educational details, will then be examined.

The chapter will then explore the key themes to emerge from a detailed analysis of the interview data. It will start by examining young people's explanations of why placements ended prematurely. This is followed by an exploration of the broader influences effecting young peoples' day-to-day lives in foster care. Subsequently, the key themes arising from the narratives of young people's experience of the breakdown will be examined in some detail. Finally, the meaning and impact of the disruption on the young peoples' lives will be explored.

Sample Profile

In this study, six young people were interviewed about the experience of foster care breakdown. Demographically, the participants ranged in age from 19 to 24 years and the sample included two male, and four female, participants. There was some variation in the sample in terms of participants' nationality: five participants were Irish (four of whom were born and grew up in Dublin, while one young person was born in the West of Ireland) and the final participant was of African origin. A majority of the young people had been linked with Children and Families services based in Dublin, while two participants had previously been connected with social work services in the South East of the country.

Table 3.1 Overall Care History

	Male, 19 years	Female, 19 years	Male, 19 years	Female, 24 years	Female, 19 years	Female, 22 years
Age at Reception into Care	3/ 4 years	9 years	2/3 years	6 years	9 years	15 years
Number of Receptions into Care	3*	1	2*	4	1	1
Total Number of Care Placements	11*	7	10*	8	3	2
Number of Residential[12] Placements	8*	1	7*	5	0	0
Number of Foster Care Placements	3*	6	3	3	3	2

* Denotes when the participants was uncertain about the figure, and in all such circumstances, minimum values are presented.

Table 3.1 above presents data on young people's overall care histories. As highlighted above, there was wide variation in the age at which the participants were first received into care, which ranged from 2 to 15 years. The majority of the young people had just one reception into care, however, some had multiple, up to four, admissions to care.

As outlined in Chapter Two, the young people completed a 'placement history timeline' during the interview which provided specific information on their placements within care. Perhaps significantly, two participants could not recall a number of years they had spent in care and were unsure about the precise number of care placements they had experienced. This was perhaps indicative of the fact that all of the young people interviewed had experienced great instability during their lives in care. For example, in total the six participants in the sample reported a combined number of 41 care placements, which is an average of approximately seven placements per participant.

With regard to placement type, clearly, all of the young people in this sample had at least one foster care placement. However, the majority also had been placed residential care settings during their lives in state care. Along with mainstream residential care, the young people also reported experiences of placement in specialised residential settings, for example, one young people had experienced multiple admissions to secure care and high support placements, while another had been incarcerated in St Patrick's Institution and in a children's detention centre.

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[12] Residential Care Placements refers to all types of care institutional settings, mainstream residential, along with High Support and Secure Care placements.

Table 3.2 Foster Care History

	Male, 19 years	Female, 19 years	Male, 19 years	Female, 24 years	Female, 19 years	Female, 22 years
Total Number of Foster Care Placements	3*	6	3*	3	3	2
Number of General Foster Placements	3*	5	2*	3	3	2
Number of Relative Placements	0	1	1	0	0	0
Number of Foster/ Relative Care Breakdowns	1	2	2*	2	2	1
Age at Breakdown	7/8 years 17 years	12 years	18 years	14 years 20 years	10 years 18 years	18 years
Length of Time in Placement at Breakdown	3 years	2 years 5 years	4 years	1 year 5 years	1 year 7 years	3 years

* Denotes when the participants was uncertain about the figure, and in all such circumstances, minimum values are presented.

Table 3.2 presents data specific to the participants' time in foster care. As is highlighted above, the young people had experienced between two to six foster care placements each. In total, the six participants had been placed in 20 foster care placements between them, with each young person experiencing, on average, three foster placements. Two participants had been placed in relative care, a placement type which is given specific attention within the thematic analysis. Of these 20 foster care placements experienced, exactly half (ten), had ended prematurely. Therefore, although six participants partook in the study, in total, narratives and accounts were garnered on all ten disruptions.

There was substantial variation in the length of placement prior to breakdown, which ranged from one to seven years. On average, the participants had been in their foster homes for three and a half years prior to the breakdown. Finally, data was also collated on the young person's age at the time of breakdown, a factor which has been given attention in the vast body of quantitative studies. There was a broad age range in this study, with the youngest participant seven-years-old at the time of the placement breakdown, while at the other end, another participant was twenty years of age when her placement terminated prematurely. On average, young people were 15-years old when their placement ended.

Diversity was achieved in terms of the current circumstances of the study's participants. With regard to accommodation, three of the young people were living independently and had stable accommodation, two others were homeless (but at the time of interview both were temporarily living with family members), while the final young person continued to live with a foster carer. In terms of education, three young people had completed their Leaving Certificate Examination (LCE), while the other three participants had not completed secondary school. Of those who had not completed the LCE, two young people reported that they had no structured activities in their days, while the third young person was engaged in volunteer work, and hoped to complete some further education, such as a FAS course, in the near future. Of the three young people who had completed their LCE, one was awaiting the results and hoped to commence a degree in Law, while another had begun a third level course, but had deferred this and hoped to return in the near future, while the final participant was enrolled and attending a third level education course.

Overall, at the time of interview, half of the young people described experiences which are suggestive of a high level of instability, including reports of homelessness, drug use and mental health issues[13]. The remaining young people reported greater stability in their lives in the sense that they had secure accommodation, were attending an education/training course, and were also involved in pro-social activities, such as volunteer work.

Reflections on Disrupted Placements

This study garnered narratives on young peoples' overall reflections on foster placements that ended prematurely, including their views of the placement, their feelings about the ending of the placement, and their explanations of why a placement ended prematurely.

Young peoples' views on a placement that had ended prematurely, and their feelings about its ending were inextricably linked. Two distinct categories were evident: those with positive views of the placement, who regretted its premature ending and, conversely, those who had very negative placement experiences and welcomed the disruption. With regard to the former, many young people recalled positive placement experiences, and consequentially, deeply regretted the placement's premature ending. As illustrated in the following account, feelings of sadness about the

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[13] To be specific, one young person reported homelessness, drug use and mental health issues, another participant reported homelessness and drug use, while the final young person reported being diagnosed with several mental health issues.

placement breakdown dominated these narratives: *"So it was the first time that, of my memory, that anyone (had) ever been so nice to me, not hitting me and all that stuff, not being in fear ... So my first placement was there, so I wasn't very happy when we moved ... I cried the entire way".* However, alongside feelings of sadness, some reported feelings of anger, for example this 24-year-old female expressed frustration at having to leave the foster placement in which she had happily lived for one year, to return to a residential care setting *"I just like, I was annoyed at them (foster carers) for sending me back".*

These accounts were counterbalanced by a comparable number of young people who had negative placement experience, wherein a discourse of perceived maltreatment emerged strongly from the narratives. Participants recalled being "treated differently" and not "being wanted", feelings which emerged most strongly within narratives of their relationships with their foster carers' birth children, a topic which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. There were, however, also many accounts of specific experiences of maltreatment including slapping, subjection to foster carers' verbal aggression and intimidating behaviour, exposure to foster family members' drug use, and physical and emotional needs not being met[14]. The following comment encapsulates the frustrations felt by many young people during negative placements and their subsequent feeling of relief when such placements ended: *"I cannot stay in this house with her (foster carer) anymore I'm actually on the verge of cracking ... I moved in (to new placement) on the (date); I was happy then".* Unsurprisingly, there was a strong sense of negativity towards such placements and young people always expressed positive feelings about their ending: *"I felt great I did, ye, I felt great".*

One account which did not fit neatly into either of the above categories was that of a young person who had been placed in relative care. This participant had experienced a very positive placement but, nevertheless, welcomed the ending of that placement. In discussing this disruption, which occurred after a period of four years, the young person recalled: *"I knew it (onward move) was the best thing, I knew I wanted to go ... it wasn't terrible but ... she (relative carer) was grumpy ... I wanted to leave, so I was happy about it".*

This account was however an exception and, in general, participants' either expressed regret about having to leave placements in which they had been happy, while others welcomed leaving care placements which they disliked, and often where they had experienced distress. Irrespective of whether young people's views on placement breakdown were positive or negative, the ending of a placement was described powerfully, vividly, and emotively by the young people.

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[14] In two placements, the maltreatment reported was of a serious nature and in interview, the young people advised that researcher that these concerns that been, retrospectively, reported to, and investigated by, the appropriate social work department.

Participants were asked directly about their views on what caused placement breakdown and they provided brief explanations. Foster carers were most frequently cited as the individuals who brought about an end to the placement, followed by the young person him/herself as instigators of the event. Social workers and the social work service were also part of the young people's construction and description of breakdown, specifically, that social workers could have done more, particularly in communicating with them.

Young people provided diverse accounts of why foster carers ended the placement, which included: changes in the foster families' circumstances and their relationship with the foster carer's birth child, *"her daughter didn't want me there"*, moves which, for the participants often occurred quite suddenly. In other cases, foster carers were described as ending the placement on foot of cumulating difficulties and arguments over time. One young person described being "sent away" by her carers and another recalled not being collected from school by her carer, who she described as having "anger management issues".

However, in several accounts of placement breakdown, young people positioned themselves as central to the premature ending of a placement. As noted above, some young people provided accounts of maltreatment in their foster homes and, in a parallel narrative, a number also described feeling "drawn back'" to their birth family. These circumstances led some to purposefully jeopardise and ultimately terminate the placement; participants described, particularly at a younger age, a pattern of running home. While others depicted themselves as choosing to move on.

With regard to the latter, in two placement endings, it was the participants who chose to leave the placement. These young people had different reasons for leaving: for example, one young person who had described maltreatment in her placement decided to leave because she had "had enough". In contrast, the other participant's placement had been extremely positive and despite professionals advising this young male to remain in his placement, in line with his care plan[15], he considered that it was the "right time" to move:

"I told me aftercare worker at the time, she didn't think it was a good idea and she was trying to tell me to stay on a little bit longer in (placement) but I knew it was the best thing, I knew I wanted to go". [Male, 19 years,]

Regardless of young people's differing rationales for moving, both of these endings were well-considered and they ultimately proved to be positive moves in the young peoples' lives. This

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[15] The Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations, 1995 require that a care plan for the child be drawn up which sets out, among other things, the support to be provided to the child and the foster parents and the arrangements for access to the child in foster care by parents or relatives.

illustrates the importance of listening to young people in care and respecting their ability to make sound choices, as well as their capacity to participate in and contribute to decisions made about their lives.

Social workers and social work services also featured as contributing to placement breakdown, albeit to a lesser extent than foster carers or the young people themselves. Social workers were criticised for ending placements without adequate justification and for not having rigorously assessed their foster carers. However, social workers came under heaviest criticism for not involving or communicating with the young people around times of placement disruption, an issue which is discussed later when the 'experience of disruption' is examined in detail.

The above section provided an overview of young people's accounts of the immediate precursor to breakdowns. As highlighted in Chapter One, the literature on placement breakdown has been criticised for failing to contextualise the experience of placement disruption, the following section of this Chapter will therefore examine the broader influences at play in foster care which can affect placement stability. Recurring and important influences emerged, including: the birth family and the foster carer's birth children. Conversely, there was also a great deal of consistency in terms of what was considered by young people to constitute a 'positive' placement.

Key Influences on Placement Stability

"Family is just so important to me now because it took so long to get that complete family unit. This is what I always wanted. If I was to move in with my Dad it would be a dream come true" [Female, 19 years]

The strong and influential connection that participants had to their birth family, and the impact of this connection on their lives in care, emerged as a powerful and pervasive theme in the data. In all but one case, when participants were asked about important people in their lives, a birth parent or sibling was named. The strength of young people's connections with their birth families was also apparent when they discussed the experience of being received into care. Despite having only vague memories of much of his time in care, this 19-year-old male vividly recalled his reception into care and, particularly, his separation from his mother: *"… she was just saying to me like, 'You have to go', and I was saying like, 'I can't, I can't'... I was about three (years old) … and I was saying, 'I can't, I can't, I'm not going"* . For some participants, the separation from their parents, and their mothers in

particular, significantly undermined their ability to settle in a foster placement, a feature which was especially pronounced for male participants. One young person told that his foster placement had ended because: *"I wanted to be back with me mam … I used to just run away, I'd always run back home to me mams"* [Male, 19 years].

Many young people articulated resistance to being separated from their parents and also, and at times, very intensely, to having a 'substitute' family. A sense of internal and personal conflict emerged strongly from the narratives. Indeed, many accounts of these feelings and emotions offer insight into the challenge participants faced in trying to incorporate 'two families' into their lives. A 22-year-old female described the experience of moving to a care placement at the age of ten years: *"I didn't really want to go to a foster family. The night that they told me that Mam had passed away, my first reaction was like, 'I'm not going to live with a foster family, I am not, under any circumstances!"* [Female, 22 years].

Despite much resistance, many of the young people were placed in foster care for many years and, alongside experiencing placement breakdowns, many also recalled experiencing positive foster placements, and named foster carers as supportive and important people in their lives. Overwhelmingly, positive placements were depicted as ones in which the foster carers encouraged birth family contact. For example, when asked about her most recent placement, one participant explained the positive dimensions of this placement with direct reference to her birth family:

"My mother came up a couple of times with (my siblings) and (the foster family) let them stay one or two nights. And then when I had my 21st then as well, (my foster family) done all that as well and let me mother and (my siblings) all come down" [Female, 22 years].

While a positive placement was characterised by a considerable number as incorporating an inclusive and co-operative relationship between birth and foster parents, other foster carers were depicted as discouraging the development and maintenance of birth family relationships, a feature viewed as resoundingly negative by young people. One young person recalled developing a relationship with her biological father and highlighted the contrasting roles of two different foster parents in this regard:

"When I met (my father), I didn't know him very well, and my (former) foster parents had it in my head that I shouldn't trust him, he's a bad person, they brought up all this emotional stuff that I didn't actually have so I was very, very confused. So I didn't want to speak with him, didn't want anything to do with him … But I only really got close to him in the last two years. When I was with

my (former) foster parents, I didn't get to see him as much, they wouldn't let me. But with (current foster carer), I see my dad so many times a week" [Female, 19 years].

Alongside accounts of foster carers discouraging birth family contact, there were also narratives of birth parents actively undermining foster placements. Again, this was viewed negatively by those young people who talked about this experience. One participant described her father's thoughts about her foster carer:

"I think he didn't like cause I always talked good about her (foster carer), I never had anything bad to say about her, so that was kinda getting to him like, cause he always used to say smart things like, "Eh, are you going down to (foster carer) now like?". Comments, that he was jealous or something … and I think that if he seen someone else, like me like growing fond of (foster carer) like, he didn't like that, cause it wasn't him" [Female, 19 years].

Although this young person spoke negatively about her father and disagreed with his views, nevertheless, it was clear that these views deeply affected her. This account highlights the conflicted positions that young people frequently experience within substitute care, particularly when placed at the centre of opposing and emotive relationships.

Along with parental relationships, the importance of sibling relationships featured strongly in all of the narratives, with siblings specifically named as important, trustworthy people in young people's lives. There were also accounts of young people returning to live with a sibling on turning 18 years of age: *"I like being with me (siblings) cause like I haven't been there since, that's like the first time we lived together since we were first put into care … so I am kinda happy that we are back together".* Another participant explained that his sibling became his relative carer at the age of 15 years, a placement depicted as playing a powerfully positive role in his life.

During their time in care, all of the young people had been separated from some or all of their siblings at some point in time, a separation framed as a key area of loss by young people who almost always expressed a strong sense of regret and sadness associated with the experience. This loss appeared to be particularly compounded as prior to the separation, siblings were frequently portrayed as consistent and reliable people in the participants' generally unstable lives: *"I was with me sister until in went into (placement). That was hard like, I had always been with her until then … it was real hard, it was the first time I was away from me sister".*

Participants appeared to be particularly vulnerable to separation from their siblings at times of placement breakdown. When participants were separated from their siblings, placement location acted as a significant barrier to them maintaining these relationships. One participant explained that

in moving to her third placement, one which was outside of Dublin, her contact with many important individuals in her life, including her siblings, was highly restricted:

"I found it the hardest when they put me out to (placement outside Dublin) like cause I was only like, like twelve or thirteen like and like I only got one phone call in the two or three months that I was out there, to me family like…..me sister only came out to see me once as well like, cause she was like, we were like younger like at the time" [Female, 19 years].

One young person's birth family had been so fragmented by her reception into care and by subsequent placement disruptions that she had no contact with, and very limited information about her siblings. This 24-year-old participant eagerly anticipated her keyworker assisting her in completing a 'family tree': *"I'm curious now to see where, like the whole family is, and see exactly were like I generated from".* This account highlights that, despite even extremely limited contact with siblings, they continue to assume an important role for children in care and that they can form a crucial part of young peoples' self-identity.

As well with birth parents, positive foster placements tended to be those in which the foster carers facilitated and encouraged positive sibling relationships. A theme which emerged as particularly positive in this regard was the role of relative care placements. When discussing her separation from her siblings, one young person explained that: *"It wasn't that bad like, it wasn't bad at the start, like cause me (relative carer) like, like they'd all go to each other's house, like so we'd (siblings) still get to see each other like"* [Female, 19 years].

An interesting feature of this sample was that although valued and held in high regard, siblings were named as a source of placement breakdown for the participants on two occasions. What follows is one participant's account of her brother's behaviour causing her placement to end: *"… when they (social workers) put you together with your sibling they don't want to split you up. So, if one sibling had a problem, they move both of you. So I was never really given the chance. But I really did like that placement".* Similarly, for another participant, her sibling coming to live in her foster home was the catalyst for the breakdown of her own placement. However, in contrast to the first young person, this participants' sibling remained in the placement, while she was asked to leave: *"About two years later my sister got moved from her placement up to where I was staying. She is still there to this day".*

Notwithstanding that siblings, in some instances, were named as a source of care instability and a cause of placement breakdown, a theme which was common and dominant in this research study was participants holding their siblings in high regard and valuing these relationships. This appears to

be due to the sense of identity that young people develop from their siblings, and also because siblings offer participants a crucial sense of 'shared experience': *"I think it was a good decision to leave me and my sibling together 'cause we are family. So having the same experience, we know each other so much better and if my brother's upset or anything like that, I'm the one who gets a call to go talk to him. So I think that is good that they kept us together".*

Foster Carer's Birth Children: New family dynamics

In all but one of the foster placements, the participants reported that there were other children, either the foster carers' birth children, or other children in care, in the foster home. The young peoples' relationships with the other children in the foster home, most especially the foster carers' birth children, emerged as a dominant and emotive theme in the narratives. There was considerable consistency across the accounts of the six young people interviewed in this regard. Insofar as, positive relationships with foster carers' birth children were depicted as supporting the placement, and conversely, poor relationships with the foster carer's children were perceived as casting a negative shadow on the participant's feelings about the placement. The latter was the most commonly reported experience and, overall, young people's accounts of their relationships with the foster carers' birth children were overwhelmingly negative. This topic evoked very powerful recollections and emotive language from the young people and several used derogatory terms to describe their feelings about the birth children of their foster carer(s): *"Ah, she was a bitch. I hated her"* and *"they're little scumbags".*

Indeed, in two cases, young peoples' negative relationship with the other children in the placement was central to their accounts of why a placement ended. When asked why her first placement ended one young person gave the following account:

"Cause (carer's birth child) like, she …was 'atter putting me bed out in the landing like and said that I was allowed, that I wasn't staying in the room with her anymore…..Putting like an eleven year old child out like just because her daughter wasn't …. Why would you put a child out like just because she said SHE didn't want me there like? Like, there was no reason like whatsoever, like I never did anything like….she was just used to getting her own way like ALL THE TIME" [Female, 19 years]

Although a majority of placement disruptions were not attributed by young people to their relationship with the other children in the placement, accounts of these relationships, and their perceived impact, were powerful. A common strand in the narratives, particularly for female participants placed with female birth children, was that of jealousy:

"Everyone in the family said it, cause (carer) paid attention to me, cause she was the baby of the family like, but she was like, she was 35 at the time…..like (carer)'s niece would be saying to me like, like she's just jealous of you, of the attention (carer) is giving you like. But like at the age of 35 like, why would you be jealous of someone?" [Female, 19 years].

Feelings of being treated differently were also prominent in these narratives and a number of the young people recounted times when they were blamed for items that went missing from the household: "*When she (foster carer's birth child) was leaving she'd lock her door, if something went missing she'd say I stole it.* Another young person told that she was isolated and excluded by the birth children *"'Don't come near my room….you don't have anything to do with me, blah blah blah"*.

A majority of the narratives related to the participants' relationship with the foster carers' birth children; however it is clear that all children in the placement, including other children in care, also influenced participants' overall placement experience. For example, one young person felt a deep sense of differentiation, from another foster child in the home. This participant related the child's length of time in the placement, to her sense of belonging within the family: *"the foster daughter, maybe she's adopted now…..she's there since she's born so she's practically like they're daughter"*. [Female, 22 years]

Along with accounts of the other children in the foster home treating participants differently, several accounts strongly emphasised that foster carers also treated them less well than their own children. For example, participants recalled been given different food, *"they'd (foster carers birth children) be getting four course meals like and it'd be beans on toast for me and me sister like"*, and generally being treated differently, "*the mom would constantly be doing things with her daughter take her shopping, take her out, but would never involve me in those things so I was always left home alone"*.

Feeling treated differently was distressing and weighed heavy on the participants and it acted as a strong barrier to their ability to settle in the foster home. There was a general sense from the participants that the foster carers' birth children 'could do no wrong', demonstrating Butler and Charles' (1999) hierarchy of value. This young person identified this as an obstacle to settling and feeling 'at home' with a foster family where she lived for seven years: *"her kids never done anything wrong……we weren't allowed bring our friends in and her kids were"*.

For others, albeit a smaller number, it is clear that a positive relationship with the foster carer's birth children contributed positively to young people's placement experiences. For example, when this young person was asked about her views on one particular placement she responded: *"That was grand, there was a girl like, near enough my age, she was nice, it wasn't that bad"*. Another young

person similarly linked her relationship with the younger children in the placement to her ability to 'settle in' she explained that being given the responsibility of minding the younger children signalled a strong level of trust on the part of her carer. This young person specifically identified this as a reason why she felt "at home" and "like one of their own" in that placement. These accounts suggests that, for many, placement happiness is closely reliant on, or at least greatly influenced by, the young person's relationship with the other children in the placement.

Although this study focused on the perspective of the young people with care experience, their narratives also shed light on the how the fostering process can be experienced by the foster carers' birth children. The following quotation alludes to more complex dynamics, and competing needs at play:

"She (foster carers' birth child) was annoyed 'cause (she) thought her parents went going to foster, so she saw us more as intruders into the house ..... I think the other children in the house, they do get kind of jealous and their response then is to completely isolate and exclude the foster child" [Female, 19 years].

This quote captures perhaps a more empathetic view of the how the fostering process is experienced by the foster carer's birth children. It also alludes to more complex family dynamics at play, and the adjustments required by all parties involved in fostering. This excerpt highlights the pivotal importance of including other children in the placement from the outset, from the decision to explore fostering, throughout the fostering assessment process, and in preparing them for any placement. Given the impact fostering can have on, and vulnerabilities it can expose in, the foster carers' birth children, this quotation also illustrates the need for foster carers, and for the social work department to support the carers in managing all of the children's, often competing needs and emotions.

The Key Ingredients of Positive Placements

All participants were asked to discuss aspects of their most positive placement experience during interview[16]. Regardless of placement type, there was a relatively high level of consistency in what

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[16] Interestingly, some participants chose to discuss placements that had ended prematurely, although, the majority discussed other foster placements. Some participants could not recall experiencing any positive foster care placements, and therefore, they chose discussed positive aspect of residential placements.

young people perceived supports foster placements. Alongside the aforementioned aspects, such as foster carers supporting young people's relationships with birth families, and positive relationship with foster carer's birth children, several young people also described very basic aspects of positive placements, including the carer being *"loving and caring, listening to you, and being there for you"*, and a place or home where they *"felt wanted"*. There was also a strong emphasis in the narratives on placements where they felt unconditional love, stability, and security:

"I've never doubted that (foster carer) didn't love me, even if we got into a fight….so it's the fact that I can't doubt that they don't care about me. And I don't have to think: 'Oh they are sending me to another foster family'?" [Female, 19 years]

The importance of preparation for, and participation in the planning of, placements in supporting children during placement moves also emerged strongly. This feature was articulated in two distinct ways; firstly, young people valued the benefits of placements having a 'transition period' since this allowed them to 'get to know' the carer and build positive relationships:

"I think it (transition process) was good ye. I can remember kinda like sitting at the table and talking to her (foster carer) and she used to say to me like, like this was when I was going on visits like, "what do you eat? I want to have it for her when you come down or" anything like that. Like, like I grew real fond of her like" [Female, 19 years].

Participants' perceived level of choice in the placement was a second important feature to emerge, and young people clearly associated the experience of having a 'say' in a placement as promoting and supporting an overall positive experience. When asked why a certain placement was remembered more positively, this 19-year-old male replied: *"Ye, it was different than the others like. I suppose it was YOUR CHOICE; I think that made it different, like I asked (carer) if I could stay"*. The importance of young people's involvement in decisions that govern their lives emerged strongly in the narratives, particularly when they discussed the issue of placement breakdown.

A particularly positive and remarkably influential placement type to emerge from this study was one participant's experience of relative care. Prior to this placement, the participant had multiple admissions to secure care, high support and several other residential care settings, and in all respects, and as self-identified in the interview, this young person had been 'out of control' and on a destructive pathway[17]. However, this participant identified that the relative care placement was the 'turning point' in his life, and facilitated him to undergo a remarkably positive change. When asked

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[17] The participant advised the researcher that many of his friends in care were now incarcerated or deceased.

about the positives associated with this placement, the young person provided the following account:

"Well, it's just better like, it's better to be with your family than others. Like when it's your family, its people you know like. It means you're not having to meet strangers. It means that you're not feeling like nobody wants you. And that's how you feel, when you have to go to strangers, you ask 'well why could nobody in me family take me, why does nobody want me, why didn't I go to me uncle or aunties like. Why am I thrown into a home'?" [Male, 19 years].

This account again draws attention to the importance children in care afford to feeling a sense of belonging in their foster homes and also underlines the importance of both immediate and extended birth family members in young people's lives. Although only one example, and notwithstanding the fact that the other relative placements broke-down, it is clear that when a child cannot stay with parents, relative placements can offer a valued sense of belonging and limit the sense of rejection and loss experienced by young people.

Experiences of Placement Breakdown

"They (social workers) don't tell you anything, they drop you off to the house, they introduce you to the people, and they leave. That's how the social workers do it which is really bad as a child because you're actually so freaked out. You are really upset, and you're thinking I was actually happy but your just dumped at someone's house, some of your clothes are brought, they don't talk to YOU; they talk to the foster parents. Then they just go. And that's what happened at each placement even though we were even older, (you) just don't get given information....Jesus Christ you're putting them in someone's house, someone else's family!" [Female, 19 years].

A prominent theme to emerge from the narratives centred on the sense of disempowerment experienced by young people during the disruption process. The young people commonly recalled being partially, if not totally, unaware of difficulties in their placements, or of the risk of their placement ending.

For the few participants who had awareness of emerging or on-going difficulties and of the possibility of their placements ending, issues emerged in relation to their participation in decision-making and inclusion in the planning of the onward placement. For example, one participant recalled learning about the imminent breakdown of her foster care placement of three years by overhearing

a discussion between her foster carers. This 22-year-old female was moved from that placement by a social worker, unknown to her, three days later: *"(My social worker) was away so her (colleague), I can't remember his name, he came and collected me and my bags and stuff".* This account illustrates a lack of child-centred practice and characterises how the breakdown process can be an isolating and alienating experience for young people.

Some participants were given notice prior to their placement ending, however as they were unaware of placement difficulties, they were often shocked by the development.

"When they said 'you're going' it was like, do you ever get the feeling, like your blood has drained from your body and you just feel like you're going to hit the floor? And I was like okay, when am I going? And they (foster carers) said you're going in a week, after you finish school. So I finished in first year and I was gone and all in a week" [Female, 24 years].

From the above quotation, it is apparent how disempowered young people can feel in the disruption process. The experience of breakdown is also juxtaposed with normal teenage life, offering a genuine insight into the reality of disruption for many young people. For example, at a time when many are excited about their first three month summer holiday, the young person quoted above was coming to terms with being uprooted from her home, foster family, and friends.

For those who had been given some notice of the disruption, the waiting period ahead of the move was portrayed as a very difficult time. For example, one young person described this one week period as *"really awkward"* while another *"Awh, they (three days' notice) were the worst like ah….all I done was sat up in the bedroom and done nothing and ……..I'd be just sitting there, I felt like I was, like a little ghost or something".*

However, participants often did not have a 'waiting period', as the young people more commonly reported that they were provided with no advance information or notice about the need to move.

"I still remember, I got dressed, came out (of) the shower (and) the social workers were there. I got told to go to a car and I was like 'oh maybe they're taken us for lunch somewhere to talk' but then the car was loaded with our stuff and we were like 'woah wait what's going on?' and that's what happened…..from me coming out of the shower getting dressed, right into a car, two hours later I was in somebody else's house" [Female, 19 years].

This account demonstrates the abrupt and unexpected nature of placement breakdown and also illustrates the sense of shock surrounding the event for several of the young people. While it is somewhat inevitable that some placements may end in an unplanned way, social workers invariably

came under severe criticism for their failure to share information with the young people about their next placement. Indeed, many accounts shared the experience of young people having had no involvement or participatory role in this process.

"… the social worker just dropped me at a door and just said like "Shannon that's Rita, Rita, that's Shannon" like. Like she could have at least stayed in there for like, like ten minutes like, like d'ya know what I mean? I was only bleeding eleven or twelve at the time like" [Female, 19 years].

Frequently, when discussing the experience of placement breakdown, young people often depicted themselves as passive recipients of the disruption process, whose existence was precarious to other people decisions. For example, the participant above went on to explain that she moved between six short-term foster placements over the next two years:

"I didn't know anything like, they kept just moving me from places like and they weren't telling me anything like that was happening like. They wouldn't say like, 'Well you're gonna stay here like for a week, then we're gonna move you like'. It was kind like you're gonna arrive at the door and 'tell (participant that) she's moving like'." [Female, 19 years].

Permeating many accounts was a shared sense of disempowerment and loss of control over their own destiny, a situation which was exacerbated by their lack of involvement and participation in crucial decisions governing their lives. In this respect, the young people were left almost completely disenfranchised in the ending process.

Overall Experience of Foster Care:

The experience of the disrupted placement cannot be considered in isolation of the participants' accounts of the overall care experience, accounts which were also marked by sense of uncertainty, instability and a lack of involvement in their own care planning. The lack of participation and involvement in decisions that govern their lives was a dominant feature of narratives of the disruption process and one which also penetrated several accounts of the overall care experience. For example, young people were almost always critical of Child in Care Reviews.[18] A common complaint was that these review meetings were focused on the foster carers, rather than on the

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[18] A Child in Care Review meeting, is one all aspects of the child's care plan is reviewed. Such meetings should take place within legally defined time limits, as per the Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995, and Child Care (Placement of Children with Relatives) Regulations 1995.

young person. A number also felt that foster carers' presence at these meetings acted as a barrier to their ability to honestly appraise their placement:

"… when we had those (review) meetings. I think if the foster parents weren't in the room I might actually open up a bit more. When I had mine (former foster carer would) be sitting there throwing the daggers at you like 'don't say this and don't say that' And then after the meeting she'd be like 'oh that went very well didn't it?' and I'd be like 'yeah cause your sitting there'" [Female, 24 years].

In terms of social work service, the most common complaint was that participants did not have an allocated social worker for prolonged periods of time, a feature found irrespective of geographical location. Young people were particularly vulnerable to not having an allocated a social worker when in foster, rather than residential care. For example, several participants recalled not having an allocated social worker throughout their whole time in foster care, and highlighted that a 'duty' social worker would visit at times of crisis, such as placement breakdowns, and would focus on talking to the foster carers, rather than the participants. This emerged as a powerful source of frustration for the young people: *"social workers never came over to check on us. And if they did, they wouldn't speak to us they speak to foster parents".* [Female, 19 years]

Participants were however, positive about the potential contribution that a consistent social worker could have made to their overall experience of care, and specifically at the time of disruption. Indeed, there were some, although very limited, positive accounts of social work intervention. This male participant reported never having a social worker while in foster care, but spoke fondly a social worker allocated to him while in a residential placement: *"My ole social worker she was good she was … Ah, I think (social worker) was tops like"* [Male, 19 years]. Significantly, the positivity this young person associated with this particular social worker related to that fact that she imparted information to him: *"Being out straight like, honest like. Say like there was a problem like (this social worker) would say (it not like) with any other social workers before".*

Interestingly, the overall lack of information given to the young people throughout their time in care was mirrored by how little the participants communicated their feelings and concerns to others at the time of placement breakdown. As is discussed in detail in the next section, rather than expressing their feelings and emotions, young people perhaps demonstrated what had been modelled to them, and did not express not discuss their feeling and emotions.

The Impact of Placement Breakdown: Loss and Shutting Down

Although many young people welcomed the placement breakdown, all but one described the disruption having a powerful negative impact on their lives. This impact was generally felt in two ways; firstly, it was experienced as a loss, and also, the time of disruption ran in parallel with the young people 'shutting down' emotionally.

A unanimous theme for the participants was that placement breakdown was a time of profound loss, even for those who welcomed the ending of the placement. To provide some background to the exploration of the theme of loss, participants in this study had experienced several losses and adversities prior to the experience of placement breakdown. For example, one young person lost her mother, two siblings and an uncle, while another participant had experienced the death of a sibling, a friend and an uncle. Two other participants had also both been bereaved by their mothers. In addition, all the participants had experienced the severe loss associated with being taken into care (Fahlberg, 1991).

Placement moves, and specifically placement breakdowns, acted as a further source of loss for these young people. The losses were felt and manifested in different ways, including the loss associated with leaving the placement, loss of friendships, loss of belongings, loss of self-identity and (as discussed above) the loss of siblings, and the loss of power over one's destiny.

Universally, participants had to cope with the physical loss of a home and the loss of familiarity. For those who regretted the ending of the placement, they were also faced with losing the home they loved and, very often, relationships with the foster family members[19]. These participants expressed sorrow about the ending of placements and these narratives often centred on missing their home, and wanting to be back in the placement. For example, this female participant describes longing to be back in the physical and conceptual home she had known for five years: *"I do regret not being able to stay there…like 'cause I would be still there now like. Like, I'd love to be back there. I didn't realise like what she was doing for me like an all … I kinda, I'd love to be back like". [Female, 19 years].*

Another source of loss at the time of breakdown was the loss of belongings, such as clothing. *"When I had to get all my stuff like, she (foster carer) wouldn't give everything, everything wasn't given like. When I was leaving I barely had anything, she kept most of the stuff, anything she (had given me) I*

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[19] Only two of the young people had on-going contact with their foster families. In both cases, the young people reported that they initially instigated and continued to arrange the contact, which proved to be a source of frustration for these young people. Nevertheless, these former foster carers were seen as sources of support for the participants, and provided an important connection to their previous lives.

had to give back". Although material items, this loss weighed heavily on this 22-year-old female, and acted as another erosion of her identity, which she had to re- build in her subsequent placement.

Positively, there were limited accounts of lost friendships due to instability in care, with the young people's accounts suggesting that social work services attempted to maintain consistent school placements. However, when friendships were lost, this deeply affected the young people, as is illustrated in the following excerpt: *"Once I cried … because one of me best friends was in that gaff and we were getting split up, so. That was hard alright"* [Male, 19 years].

Another feature of the participant's narratives of the impact of placement breakdown was of the loss of self-identity. *"I just think that, meself, that I don't know like I just, I just went off the wall like when I wasn't living there anymore. Like I was just a completely, completely different person like".* This narrative illustrates a common account of the loss of 'one-self' and self-identity following a placement breakdown.

Profoundly, one young person recalled that the impact of the instability while in care meant he had lost recollections and memories of a number of years of his life: *"Like, there's three or four years of, when I've lived in and out of foster families, that I can't remember".* [Male, 19 years]

Coping with Loss: Shutting Down

"I would completely blow it off and shut down, it's like 'I don't care'……I'd be dismissive" [Female, 19 years]

A universal theme to emerge from this study was that participants responded to placement breakdown, and often to the lack of knowledge of the breakdown and of their onward care plan, by 'shutting down', being dismissive or, in attachment terms, building 'a suffering skin' (Beaumont, 2012).

It was striking that few participants had ever discussed the 'event' of the breakdown, let alone the experience or impact of the disruption, with others. One participant appeared to enact 'shutting down' during the interview, as her voice became very low and she presented as closed and cautious. This participant stated: *"This is probably the first time I talked about that (placement breakdown)…so that's why I don't know what to say".* [Female, 22 years]

Some young people specifically named 'shutting down' as a coping mechanism used to counterbalance the uncertainty which accompanied breakdown, while others alluded to emotionally

withdrawing. In terms of the former, one participant stated: *"I really think (children in care) should be given information … because otherwise you're going into the place with that mentality like 'I was just abandoned here'… and then they start to shut down".* For others, shutting down was less explicit, as participants often described that they learned to cope with feelings of unhappiness by being *"quiet …. I wouldn't say nothing, I'd sit there and just be quite…and stare and not talk like".* Other references to avoidance and shutting down included: *"I think mainly that I was trying to block it out, that it wasn't really happening, even though I knew that I wasn't living there".* Similarly, another young person described how she coped with the breakdown of her first foster placement: *"Let it go! After about a week or two, when I realised that we were never going back there, so I just had to let go, I got over it a little bit, 'I just thought okay it's not that bad', so (I) just had to let it go".*

The accounts of many indicate that shutting down was not simply a temporary mechanism used during the period subsequent to the placement breakdown, with several young people stating they had continued to 'shut down', avoid and deny into their adult life. *"I can't talk to counsellors, d'ya know what I mean? ….I tried, but I just shut down and I walk out"* [Male, 19 years]

Indeed, one young person offered powerful metaphor of how, at twelve years of age, she dealt with feelings of sadness and anger following her first placement breakdown: *"A great way to describe it is a swan……what does a swan do with its feet underneath the water? Go mad fast with their feet. And that's what it's like; you kind of bottle everything up and its racing around inside …. (looking calm) on (the) outside perspective, but inside, its racing!".* This metaphor offers an invaluable insight into a developed coping mechanism and serves to highlight how young people can become adept at disguising their emotions to the outside world.

The narratives also shed light on the impact of instability on future placements by linking the experience of uncertainty to a future inability to build relationships with foster families. *"I didn't know like whether I could become fond of someone in a house like or anything, because I didn't know whether I was gonna get moved or not like, I could be like there for a week or I could be there for like two months, could be there for two years".* This narrative highlights how one placement breakdown can lead to vulnerabilities in subsequent placements.

Along with 'shutting down' emotionally, the participants also described feelings of isolation, and loneliness during placement disruption. One young person repeatedly stated that she went 'downhill' following the breakdown of her most recent placement, her physical and conceptual home of five years, and to cope with this loss, she tried to escape and 'block out' these emotions:

"It did have a very big impact on me, it still does like, even though I'm not there for like nearly a year and a half like, two years like….. I just feel like, it went downhill after that. Like when that placement broke down like, me meself……like I was taking more drugs, it could have been to block everything out like. It could have been to say like "this isn't really happening", although it was like but I don't know like, it wasn't nice anyways." [Female, 19 years]

Indeed, along with emotional consequences, this young male described instability in care as having physical repercussions: *"When I get stressed as well my skin would go really bad, I have psoriasis, so that always got bad when I moved from house to house".* [Male, 19 years]

Regardless of the participants' views of disrupted placements, overall, negative effects dominated young people's narratives of the impact of the breakdown on their lives. Disruption was experienced as a loss, and a common mechanism used to buffer the effects of this experience was to shut down emotionally.

Conclusion

As highlighted in the sample profile, the six young people interviewed in this study had experienced a vast amount of placement instability during their lives in care. The findings suggest that foster care can make a positive contribution to young people's lives. Indeed, some placements that had ended prematurely were remembered positively by the participants and were framed as playing constructive roles in their lives. Yet, overwhelmingly, the experience of placement breakdown was recalled negatively by the young people. Foster carers were positioned as the primary instigators of placement breakdown, however young people also placed themselves central in placement endings. Moreover, broader than the narratives of the eventual cause of placement disruption, this study shed light on how vulnerable placements can be to many external influences, particularly the relationship between the child's birth and foster families, and the child's relationship with other children in the foster placement.

Young people overwhelmingly experienced placement breakdown as times in which they were especially disempowered and disenfranchised. Rather than being active agents in their own lives, young people were often passive recipients in the disruption process. The experience of placement

disruption proved to have a deleterious impact upon their lives; it was a framed as a time involving multiple losses and when young people 'shut down' emotionally.

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

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Introduction

Placement breakdown is widely accepted as having harmful effects on children and young people. Despite this, there is a poor understanding of the 'experience' of placement breakdown in Ireland and elsewhere, and there are particular gaps in knowledge of young people's perspectives on how placement breakdown occurs and the meanings they attach to this experience.

This study, based on the narratives of six young people, sought to provide a contextualised account of the experience of placement breakdown. Given the well cited barriers to negotiating access to this particularly 'hard to reach group' (Gilberston and Barber, 2002), and notwithstanding the particularly small sample size, this study has garnered rich narratives about young peoples' experience of placement breakdown. These accounts build upon the limited international knowledge and offer an essential contribution in the Irish context.

Drawing on the findings presented in the previous chapter, five issues have been identified as warranting further discussion: young people's experience of life in foster care; their disenfranchised position in the context of placement breakdown; the costs of disruption; the role of the social worker and social work services; and, finally, responses to disruption. The discussion of these five issues will highlight a range of implications and suggestions for social work practice and service provision. Finally, the chapter will conclude by outlining recommendations for future research.

Life in Foster Care: Vulnerable and Fragmented

Efforts to identify the factors associated with placement breakdown have dominated the literature on the topic of placement disruption, and with such a focus, the majority of these studies have been quantitative in nature and overwhelmingly have had foster carers and social workers as participants. In this study, young peoples' explanations of the reasons for placement breakdown lend some support to the vast literature on this topic. For example, as has been highlighted in several other

studies 'foster family issues' (Brown and Bednar, 2006; Buehler et al, 2003; Lally, 1991; Terling-Watt, 2001), were named as a reason for breakdown.

However, this study did not aim to provide an empirical explanation of placement breakdown; rather it focussed on the exploration of how young people understand and explain these premature endings. Significantly, the use of qualitative in-depth interviews has offered a nuanced understanding of the complexities, dynamics and adjustments at play throughout the course of young people's foster placements. Similar to other studies (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Sallanas et al, 2004; Sinclair et al, 2005), the findings highlight that young people tend to place themselves prominently as the instigators of placement breakdown, and further, lend weight to assertions that their behaviour is a strong predictor of placement breakdown (Oosterman et al, 2007). However, the findings go beyond this identification, and perhaps more significantly, they suggest why young people often instigate, or act in a way that purposefully causes, placement breakdown. Specifically, and in keeping with Barber and Delfabbro (2004), young people recalled being unhappy and experiences of maltreatment in many placements.

Along with young people's narrative of their own role in placement endings, the findings shed considerable light on external influences that can work to prevent young people from settling into a foster placement, as well as ways in which their experiences of day to day family life are very often fragmented. Two influences and sources of fragmentation are of particular interest: first, the child's position at the centre of birth and foster carer's relationships, and second, the complex adjustments required when there are other children in the foster home.

Many of the young people maintained powerful connections to their birth families throughout their lives in care. However, marrying and trying to simultaneously belong to two families, proved to be a difficult task, and one in which young people found themselves stretched in all directions (Butler and Charles, 1999). Ideally, young people, birth families and foster carers would work in partnership with one another. However, in reality, working in partnership is perforated with difficulties, conflicts and ambiguities (Thoburn et al, 1995). The impact of fraught relationships on the child can be significant, with foster and birth families often experienced as two separate and mutually exclusive worlds, a situation which frequently leaves the child with divided loyalties (Murphy and Jenkinson, 2012). Significantly, positive placements were described by the young people interviewed as those in which the foster carers had civil, co-operative and complimentary relationships with birth families.

These findings broadly support the majority of the existing quantitative literature, in that a co-operative relationship between foster and birth parents can enhance placement stability, while poor relationships can substantially undermine placements (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Berridge and Cleaver, 1987; Oosterman et al, 2007). Moreover, these findings update Butler and Charles' (1999) study, which also offered a contextualisation and understanding of how these relationships are experienced by the young people. The personalised accounts of the young people illuminate how they are often placed at the centre of, and fully exposed to, conflicting and opposing relationships, leaving the placement vulnerable to disruption and the young person with powerful feelings of fragmentation.

From a practice perspective, these findings suggest that social workers individually, and social work services in general, need to prioritise and invest in the promotion of co-operative relationships between birth and foster families. It has previously been suggested that effective partnership hinges on the foster carers' ability to accept the birth families' on-going and ever-lasting physical or emotional place in the child's life (Butler and Charles, 1999). This study's findings clearly support the importance of this suggestion, however, the findings also reveal that a co-operative relationship is not simply the sole responsibility of the foster carers; rather, it is dependent on the commitment of all parties to developing inclusive and respectful relationships. Specific intervention, such as a mediation service for all parties, particularly in long-term foster care arrangements where there is an active involvement of birth parents, merit consideration. In Ireland, mediation services are typically targeted at separated or divorced couples. However, such a service could significantly bolster attempts to prevent and, were necessary, reconcile existing tensions or conflicts between birth and foster families. Clearly, such a specific service would not be appropriate for all families, for example, where birth parents are uncooperative, aggressive or threatening.

In any event, this study has identified a focus on supporting and facilitating positive relationships between birth and foster families as crucial, if the service wishes to afford young people with the opportunity to settle in their foster placements, and if future placement disruptions are to be minimised.

An additional source of fragmentation identified in this study centres on the child's relationship with other children in the foster family, particularly but not exclusively, the foster carers' birth children, which was a particularly emotive topic for young people. The findings lend additional weight to the full body of research on placement breakdown, which indicates that placement success can be

dependent on, or at the very least influenced by, the young person's relationships with the other children in the placement (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Berridge and Cleaver, 1987; Butler and Charles, 1999; Kalland and Sinkkonen, 2001; Swan, 2002; Twigg, 1995). Again, these findings build upon Butler and Charles' (1999) study by adding renewed insight into the dynamics at play, specifically the differentiation children in care often feel, which appears to be particularly exposed when there are other children in the foster home.

Significantly, the findings also contribute a nuanced understanding of the kinds of adjustments required by foster carers' birth children. For example, birth children may harbour feelings of jealously or resentment towards children in care and they may also be unprepared for the changes brought about by fostering. These findings underline the crucial role that other children in the home play in the success of the placement.

The importance of the role and input of foster carers' birth children is recognised in Irish child care standards and policies (Department of Health and Children, 2003; HSE, n.d). However, in Ireland we have no knowledge or understanding of the extent to which this is prioritised and is occurring in practice. This study did not include foster carers' birth children as participants; however, the accounts of young people with care experience suggest that that social work services need to focus attention on, and directly support, foster carers' birth children. They further suggest that specific support and intervention is crucial to assist all members of the foster family to adjust to a 'new family life' and negotiate new family dynamics. If this intervention cannot be completed by the allocated social workers, an independent service, such as family therapy, should be considered by the professionals involved.

Overall, the findings suggest that foster placements are vulnerable to both internal and external influences and that these can result in the child experiencing fragmented and torn lives.

The Experience of Placement Breakdown: A Disenfranchised Position

Research on foster care indicates that children in care feel empowered when social workers clearly explain what is happening and when they have some participation in decision making (Falhberg, 1991). Furthermore, it is clear from the available international research evidence, and apparent also in Irish consultations and forums, that young people in care want their views and experiences to be taken into account (DYCA, 2011; EPIC, 2010; Wilson et al, 2004). Indeed, the importance of the need to empower and include young people in their care planning is also reflected in Irish policy, with the

National Standards for Foster Care stating that young people growing up in state care should be given a 'choice', and that they should have their views heard when decisions are being made about their lives (Department of Health and Children, 2003).

However, this study's findings suggest that young people were disenfranchised and disempowered throughout their lives in care, and particularly so during times of placement disruption. Specifically, young people in this study generally felt that they had little ownership over decisions made about their lives; they frequently recalled disruption as a time of great uncertainty and often found themselves in a position of 'not knowing'. Given the dominance of quantitative studies, wherein there is a vast underrepresentation of young peoples' perspectives, until recently, little has been known about this experience. However, the findings are highly consistent with the existing research which has had young people as research participants (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Rostill-Brookes et al, 2011; Sinclair et al, 2005), which also highlighted the failure to involve young people in, and to inform them of, decisions that govern their lives. Given the paucity of knowledge in Ireland, these findings offer a valuable and unique insight into Irish children's experiences, and the highly personalised and emotive narratives of this experience, extend a powerful dimension to the limited international knowledge.

The findings also lend practice-based substance to Shannon's (2000) assertion that, legally, Ireland falls short on the concept of children's rights. Unlike our Nordic counterparts who emphasis the participation and involvement of children in their own care planning, this study's findings suggest that the Irish child's voice, and their participation in planning and decision making, is not prioritised, or at the very least, has not been actualised. Notwithstanding this, the researcher recognises that there can be significant challenges associated with empowering young people during a placement breakdown since disruption often occur unexpectedly and young people can also be difficult to engage (Sinclair et al, 2005; Triseliotis et al, 2000).

Significantly, this study found that some young people actively took control over their own destiny by either choosing to behave in a way that purposefully ended a placement or by deciding to leave their placement. In the case of the latter, the young peoples' moves proved to be positive and constructive in their lives. Notwithstanding the study's small sample size, this lends further weight to arguments for adopting Fox- Harding's (1997) children's rights perspective. Not only should children and young people be included in decisions that govern their lives for moral and ethical reasons, it is also critical in helping them to be prepare emotionally and practically for a transition (Rostill-Brookes

et al, 2011), and not least because young people can offer valuable contributions to decisions that govern their lives.

As discussed in Chapter one, should the challenge to the Amendment to the Irish Constitution in terms of children rights be rejected by the High Court, systemic changes may occur and infiltrate social work practice, with children, and their rights, placed in a more prominent position in social work practice. However, this study's findings suggest that such an amendment singlehandedly will not bring about practice-based changes consistent with a children's rights perspective. As is discussed later in this chapter, the individual social worker and Children and Families Services' generally, will continue to play a crucial role in young people's experiences of foster care and of placement breakdown. Nevertheless, any strengthening of children's rights within Ireland's legislative framework, is welcomed, and can be seen as a 'step in the right direction'.

Individual and Societal Costs of Placement Breakdown

Placement breakdown is widely accepted as having harmful effects on children and the literature has consistently identified a link between the experience of disruption and a variety of poorer outcomes (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Daly, 2011; Daly and Gilligan, 2005; Darmody et al, 2013; Rubin et al, 2007; Sinclair et al, 2005; Strijker et al, 2002). This study has contributed to the relatively small body of literature which has examined young people's views on the impact of this disruption on their lives. In keeping with these studies, foster care placement breakdown was found to have deleterious effects on young people (Rostill- Brookes et al, 2011; Unrau et al, 2008). This study's qualitative approach and use of young people as the only informants, offers valuable insight the wide ranging losses that young people frequently endure alongside the breakdown of a placement. These findings extend upon the study of Unrau et al (2008), in that placement breakdown down typically involved multiple losses, including loss of home, school, friends, siblings and self-identity.

Recent Irish research children's overall care experience (Murphy and Jenkinson, 2012) has recommended that social workers have, and utilise, a theoretical perspective discussed in Chapter one, loss and grief, to support young people around the losses they experience when they are first received into care. However, in light of the finding that placement disruption is a time which involves

further and often multiple losses, consideration should also be given to social workers drawing on theories of loss and grief to support and understand young people around periods of disruption.

The findings offer valuable insight into how young people cope with their feelings and emotions during times of disruption, a topic yet to be given much attention within research, with an exception of the study of Unrau et al (2008). In keeping with this study, shutting down emotionally was a very common mechanism used by the young people, who explained that they often masked and/or blocked out their emotions from others. However, the findings extend upon Unrau et al's (2008) study, and suggest that 'shutting down' not only places a significant emotional burden on young people, but it also may jeopardise their relationships in subsequent foster placements. This finding offers a more nuanced understanding of why the experience of one placement disruption can form part of a self- perpetuating cycle which threatens future placement stability (Rich, 1996).

Placement breakdown and general care instability is clearly costly to the young people themselves but it can also prove costly for others, including foster carers, social workers and society at large (Brown and Bednar, 2006; Lally, 1991). In terms of the latter, many of the participants in this study had been placed in, and availed of, services that are costly to the state including: incarceration, placement in secure care and high support cares settings, prolonged admittance to mental health services and use of homeless and drug services.

While these issues may not be directly associated with the experience of placement disruption, it is widely accepted that placement breakdown can be harmful to a child's development and is associated with poorer outcomes, specifically those related to educational attainment and emotional and behaviour difficulties (Darmody et al, 2013; Gilligan and Daly, 2005; Rubin et al, 2007). Consequentially, there are clearly moral and social, as well as economic, reasons for seeking to ensure that social work practice and intervention with young people in out-of-home care is focussed on reducing disruption. A care system which produces well-adjusted, well-functioning young people is one which, in the long-term, is more cost effective. Conversely, the cost of 'not getting it right' is not only considerable to those directly involved, but also to society at large.

The Role of Social Workers and Children and Families Services

The disenfranchised position young people hold during their lives in care, and particularly at times of disruption, along with the cost and impact of disruption, highlight the pivotal role that social workers play in young people's lives and experiences. Previous quantitative studies (Berrick, 1997; Wilson et al, 2000) have found that the role of the social worker becomes crucially important when placements are at risk of placement. The findings support this assertion; however they also illuminate that the relationship is of crucial importance throughout the young people's lives in care, and moreover, shed light on young people's experiences of social worker involvement and, frequently shortcomings in social work service.

Consistent with the reports of regulatory inspections in the Irish context (HIQA, 2013), the findings demonstrate that some young people in care, particularly in foster care, may not have an allocated social worker. Moreover, and in keeping with the existing studies, young people who did have an allocated social worker highlighted that s/he was not available to them, did not listen to them (Rostill-Brookes et al, 20011); and focused their time and attention on foster carers, rather than the young people themselves. Significantly, within the Irish context the findings offer a valuable insight into precisely how their lack of availability is experienced and felt by the young people. Specifically, young people's accounts of the limited availability of their social workers were central to their narratives of the disenfranchised position they were assigned in the disruption process.

From a practice-based perspective, to counterbalance children and young people's disenfranchised position during their time in care, and particularly at times of crises, such as placement disruption, and for them to be included and empowered, social workers must dedicate time to getting to know the young people, prioritise building positive and purposeful relationships, act as strong advocates for them and their views and, quite simply, listen and try to understand them (EPIC, 2010; Murphy and Jenkinson, 2012). Additionally, to intervene and support the young person sensitively and appropriately, social workers must also have expert knowledge of many social work and psychological theoretical perspectives. To achieve all of the above, not only does every child in care need to have an allocated social worker; crucially, the findings further suggest that the children need a social worker who has sufficient time to achieve these essential goals.

This small scale study does not claim representativeness, however recent inspection reports and grey literature (HIQA, 2013; IASW, 2011; IMPACT, 2013; Phelan, 2013) highlight that Children and Families Services is under-resourced. For service provision to diminish the likelihood of placement disruption, or at a minimum, ensure that when disruption does occur, it is managed in a child

sensitive and centred way which facilitates a positive onward move, the service needs sufficient resourcing such that social workers develop good relationships with the young people in care, and they also have time to make informed professional assessments and decisions, and to utilise theoretical and empirical knowledge to support the young people.

Responses to Placement Disruption

Given the widely accepted deleterious effects that placement breakdown can have on young people, one obvious implication is that all efforts should be made to minimise disruption. This study's findings highlight the importance of mobilising such efforts in a preventive sense from the outset of the placement rather than at a point when the placement is deemed 'at risk' of breakdown. As detailed above, suggested means of minimising placement disruption and encouraging placement stability include supporting all concerned parties: the young person, foster carers, foster carer's birth children, and the birth parents to promote a positive placement. The findings also suggest that placements benefit from having a transition period, as has also identified in previous studies (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Sinclair et al, 2005). However, perhaps most powerfully, the findings suggest that when disruption does occur, the importance of supporting the young person in the process, providing them with age-appropriate information, and including them in all plans and decision-making cannot be over-stated (Rostill-Brookes et al, 2011).

Given the complexities involved in providing out-of-home care and the various influences on the stability of care placements, placement breakdown is likely to continue to be a feature of the child care system in Ireland and elsewhere. In keeping with international literature (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004), this study found that placement instability can at times be positive, for example, some young people gave accounts of deciding to leave placements prematurely, decisions which proved to be positive and constructive. This finding lends support to assertions that an over-reliance on a permanency planning model and achieving placement stability 'at all costs', can be problematic (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Gilligan, 1997).

The merits of social worker practice drawing from principles of a resilience-based approach which encourages and promotes protective factors in the young people's lives to buffer against future experiences of adversities, such as placement breakdown, are clear (Fernandez, 2007; Gilligan, 1997). The findings support Unrau et al's (2008) view that while theories of attachment, grief, and

traumatic stress help us to understand the negative consequences of multiple placement moves, theories of resilience can be used to shape more sensitive policies and practices in foster care.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are clearly significant gaps in knowledge and understanding of children and young people in, and with experience of, all type of out-of-home care (CAAB, 2010). This small-scale study has attempted to addresss a specific, although well-rehearsed challenge for children and young people received into foster care. Arising from this study, there are three key recommendations for future research.

The primary recommendation is for additional research studies, preferably with larger sample sizes, on the topic of foster care placement breakdown. A study with children and young people still in state care, would prove to be an interesting deviation from this study's methodology and, notwithstanding the significant ethical challenges, such a methodological approach would yield very valuable, and more contemporaneous data.

Given the pivotal importance the role foster carer's birth children play in a child's experience of foster placements, it is imperative that practitioners better understand the fostering process and the experience of disruption, from their perspective. Some international studies have explored this area (Swan, 2002; Twigg; 1995), however, there is a considerable gap in knowledge on the topic in Ireland. Increased knowledge and understanding of how best to support the birth children of foster carers could assist in minimising placement disruptions, or equally as important, support all members of the 'new foster family' to have more positive experiences.

The third and final recommendation from this study is the value of future research with children and young people with care experience. There are many merits associated with having young people as research participants. McGish and Bacon (2003) argue that young people are a rich resource of information, as their status as a 'marginalised group', means that they are more likely to be objective, seeing the reality of their situations, given that they have less interest in maintaining the status quo. While, Whiting and Lee (2003) suggest that having a clear picture a child's experience of foster care can enhance societal awareness and serve to strength foster care policy and practice.

Indeed, it has been argued that, without the perspective of the young person, research may lead to a misdirection of resources (Unrau, 2007).

Concluding remarks

This study has offered a nuanced understanding of young's people experiences of placement breakdown, in this respect it had added to a limited body of international literature, while it has offered an essential insight into the Irish context. Placement breakdown is an issue deserving of further and immediate attention both within research and social worker services. Social work with young people needs to be more effective to minimise disruptions, and similarly responses need to be supportive and sensitive to young people's feelings, when disruption does occur.

This study highlighted that disruption can leave a lasting and deleterious impression upon young people. It has also identified that some of the wider influences at play, which often make placements vulnerable, are as important as narratives of the immediate precursors to placement breakdown. Fittingly, the last words will reflect the findings of what young people want from foster placements, which is: to develop good quality relationships with all members of the foster family, to have a sense of acceptance and belonging within their foster home, to have a unified family life where birth and foster parents have civil and co-operative relationships and finally, and perhaps most powerfully, they want their views and perspectives to be asked, listened to and acted upon.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:   Gatekeeper Information Sheet

Appendix 2:   Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Appendix 3:   Interview Schedule

Appendix 4:   Placement Timeline

Appendix 5:   Coding Categories

Appendix 6:   List of Support Services

Appendix One: Gatekeeper Information Sheet

AGENCY INFORMATION FORM

Dear _____,

I am writing to request your organisation's permission to access young people who may be interested in participating in a research project entitled '*A Qualitative Exploration of Young People's Experience of Foster Care Placement Breakdown'*.

This research aims to generate an in-depth understanding of the young person's lived experience of placement breakdown. The study is particularly interested in identifying the young people's perceptions of why their placement came to a premature end, and the meaning of the breakdown for these young people.

The study hopes to recruit 6-8 young people, aged over 18 years, for semi- structured interviews. This means that, during the interview, there will be a number of set questions and topics the researcher wishes to cover. However, there will also be scope for the young people themselves to discuss issues they feel are relevant to their experience of placement breakdown.

The research is focussing on the issue of placement breakdown because it is commonly experienced by children and young people in care. Recent research studies outside of Ireland indicate that rates of placement breakdown are between 20 and 47%. Notwithstanding these high prevalence rates, little is known in the Irish context about placement breakdown, particularly from the perspective of young people who experience a premature ending to their placement. This research aims to examine the experience of placement breakdown *from the perspective of young people with a care history*.

I would be very grateful if you could facilitate this study which hopes to positively contribute to knowledge on placement breakdown among young people in Ireland. In terms of facilitating the study, I would ask you to consider the eligibility criteria for participating, that is, young people over the age of 18 years, who have a history of state care and have experienced placement breakdown. I would appreciate it if you could introduce me to young people who you think 'fit' these criteria. I will then explain the study in full to the young person/people and she/he will have time to think about whether they would like to participate.

If you require any additional information, please don't hesitate to contact me (sitobin@tcd.ie; Tel: 086 3735813). My research supervisor is Dr. Paula Mayock and her contact details are as follows: pmayock@tcd.ie; Tel: 01 8962636.

Alternatively, I would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss this research in greater detail and provide you with more detailed information about the research.

Kind regards,

_____

Sinead Tobin, *(BSS,NQSW and , Student of the Masters in Applied Social Research)*

Appendix Two: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

A Study of Young People Who Have Had Placement Breakdown

What is this study about?

I am a student researcher from Trinity College Dublin and I plan to carry out a study of young people who have been in care and have had placement moves. I am also a Fostering Social Worker, and I know that often foster placements end sooner than expected, which is sometimes called 'breakdown'.

So far, there have been many research studies in other countries, outside of Ireland, about placement breakdown, but there hasn't been any study like this in Ireland in more than twenty years!

I know from recent meetings and talks that have happened with young people in care in Ireland, that young people are saying that it can be hard to move around from place to place and to new families/homes.

To find out about placement breakdown, I could speak to social workers and foster carers, like a lot of the other studies have, but I think it's really important that <u>YOUR </u>voice is heard.

I plan to interview young people, like yourself, who have been in care, and you have experienced a foster care placement breakdown. The main reason I would like to talk to you about placement breakdown is to hear your experience and your views. I think it's important that your voice is heard and that I, and others, have a better understanding of how you feel about placement breakdown. I am especially interested in hearing your views on why a placement broke down and your experience of moving. I would also like to hear about other issues that you feel are important.

Do you have to take part?

No, the study is <u>voluntary</u> and it's completely <u>your choice</u> whether you want to take part in this study or not.

If you do decide to take part:

If you do decide to take part, you can change your mind at any time, even during the interview. Also, if you feel uncomfortable about answering certain questions during the interview, you don't have to answer them. You have the right to stop the interview at any time.

Confidentiality

If you give your permission, I would like to audiotape (using a dictaphone) the interview, so that I can keep track of what we both said during the interview. If, at any time if you don't want some part of the interview recorded, I will turn off the recorder.

After I have finished the interview, I will listen to the tape and type up what we both have said. What is typed up from the interview will be stored safely on a password protected computer and only I, and my research supervisor, will have access to the interview.

I will do my best to make sure that people are not able to identify you in the study: I will give you a "made up" name (what we call a "pseudonym") and I will remove all names of people (like your foster carers, family members, or social workers) and places that you mention when I type up the interview.

It is important that you know that what you say in the interview is completely confidential. The researcher will not tell any other adult or young person what you say in the interview. This means that whatever is discussed or spoken about in the interview will not be communicated to any other person.

There is one **exception** to this, which is when there is an immediate risk of harm to you or another person. If this did happen, nothing would be done before discussing it with you.

What does taking part involve?

If you agree to take part in this stage of the study, I will interview you at a time that suits you. You can also choose the place where you would like to be interviewed. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

During the interview, you will be asked to talk about these kinds of things:
1. How things are for you at the moment
2. How long you were in care, and the places you lived when in care, (foster families, residential)

If you have lots of moves/placement breakdowns, we will probably just pick one or two of these and then discuss:
3. Your relationships with the foster parents and their children (good and bad)
4. Any experience you have had on respite
5. Your experience of the placement coming to an end
6. Your contact with friends and birth family at the time of the placement breakdown
7. What you knew, at the time, about the placement ending
8. The reasons you think that the placement ended sooner than expected
9. What changes happened when you moved on
10. The services involved when the placement ended
11. The services/people/things that have helped you
12. Things you would like to happen in your life in the future

It is important that you know that **you do not have to answer questions on any topic that you would prefer not to talk about**. Your privacy and your choices will be respected at all times.

What Happens to the Information you Give?

The information will be written up into a dissertation (report) that I need to complete for my degree in college. This dissertation will be given to my research supervisor and my work will be assessed.

There is a possibility that some of the report may be published. Real names or any information that might identify you, or any other person, will not be used in any reports or publications.

Contacting the Researcher

If you want to discuss the study in more detail, you can contact me, Sinead Tobin, and I would be very happy to give you any more information.

The best way to contact me about the study is on my email address sitobin@tcd.ie, or you can contact me during the week, from Monday to Friday on 086 3815330 .

My research supervisor's name is Paula Mayock, and she can be contacted on telephone number (01) 896 2636.

🍁 Consent Form

> Please ✓ if you agree with the statement in EACH box:

🍁 **I have been given information about this project and understand what taking part involves.**	☐
🍁 **I understand that the information I give will not be told to any other person unless what I say suggests that I, or another person, is at risk of harm.**	☐
🍁 **I understand that I am free to leave the study at any time, without giving a reason.**	☐
🍁 **I understand that the recorded interview will be treated in complete confidence and that the recording will be destroyed.**	☐
🍁 **I understand that the information I provide during the interview will be used to write a research report.**	☐
🍁 **I am happy to take part in this study and I wish to give my permission to be interviewed.**	☐

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant (Print)   *Date*   *Signature*

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher (Print)   *Date*   *Signature*

Appendix Three: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule:

Warm-up, rapport building: How has your week been? I hope I'm not keeping you from doing anything more exciting/interesting?

Okay, and just getting started with the interview, if it's okay with you, could we start with talking about how life is going for you at the moment?

Current Information:

Can you tell me about what is going on for you at the moment?

Additional questions:
- Where do you live,
- How long have you lived there
- Who do you live with
- What do you do during a typical day (school, course)
- Can you tell me about how you spent yesterday
- Are there days when you do different things

What activities/things do you enjoy doing, what ones are going well?

Can you tell me about the people (family members, parents, sibling, friends, workers) who you are in contact with?- return to later and ask specifically about those not mentioned

Who is the most important person in your life now?

Who do you think is the person who you can most trust in your life now?

Housing History

I know that you have lived in a few different places while in care, I was wondering if you could LIST the different places you have lived?

Complete housing history…..

Life before care/ Family History:

So, if its okay with you, I'd like to talk to you about when you were younger

Can you tell me about your childhood?

Additional questions:

- Describe relationship with family members, siblings and friends
- Activities/things that you enjoyed doing
- Any positive people/things in your life
- Any major difficulties/negative memories
- Any major changes

Care History

So from completing your housing history, I can see you have been in care and I was wondering if we could have a more detailed chat about that now?

Can you tell me about what was going on when you went into care?

What is your understanding of why you were in care?

Could you describe your overall experience of care/if you were to describe what being in care is like to somebody what would you say?

Experience of Placement Breakdown

For the moment, if it's okay with you (NAME), could we focus on 2/3 of the foster placements that didn't go well, and that ended earlier than expected?- refer to placement history.

Placement Overview, plan

Can you tell me about your time with _____(foster family)?

I see you were _____years, and you stayed for _____years/months.

How long were you meant to stay with this family for?

Probe:

- knowledge of court orders,
- who provided this knowledge, social worker, foster family birth family etc,
- query attendance at child in care reviews, placement plan and care plan meetings etc.

Explore feelings around this, and impact on "settling, developing relationships".

Do you feel you were able to settle?

Yes: how , what helped

No: what were the barriers?

Foster Family Composition

Who lived in the house?

How did you get on with (name each family member)

Did you always have this type of relationship with (name each family member)

Probe all of these for feelings and impact....e.g.s

- how did that make you feel?
- how was that for you?
- how did you manage/cope with this?

Do you have any happy memories of living with the _____(foster family)?

If yes: can you tell me about those happy times?

If no: how would people around you have known that you were unhappy?

Context at time of placement

What else was going on for you at the time? (school, friends, activities)

Did you have contact with your birth family during this time?

What did they (birth family) think about you living with the _____(foster family)

How did you know that they thought this?

Re-cap and paraphrase what the respondent has said so far: So, you said that you lived with _____(foster family) for _____(time).

Circumstances leading to the breakdown:

Can you tell me about the time when the placement ended?

When did you first know there was a problem, likely to end?

Did you discuss the problems in the placement with anyone?

How did that affect you/ Can you remember how you felt at that time?

Were there any other changes/transitions in your life at that time?

How long from knowing end to day of moving?

Perception of why the placement breakdown?

Why do you think the placement ended?

Probe all contact and relationships at the time of breakdown: all foster family members, birth family, social worker and friends

What was your relationship with _____like at the time?

Can you tell me about other things that were going on for you at the time of the breakdown: involvement in activities/friends etc

What do you think the _____(foster family) would say the reasons for the breakdown are?

Looking back, do you think things could have been different?

Was there anything that could have changed the outcome?

Was there any support that you needed at the time that wasn't there for you?

Role of respite:

Did you ever go on respite?

What was that like?

How was the respite placement explained to you/were you given much notice about it?

How was it when you got back to the _____ family?

Day of Move

So just looking at the day you moved on then…….

Can you tell me everything you remember about the day that you moved out?

Did you know where you were moving to?

Who went with you? Social worker, birth family, foster family, new foster family.

What was it like, moving to a new family/new home?

How do you remember feeling at the time?

How did you cope/ express these feelings?

Impact of the move:

How did you feel when you were moving?

What other changes happened when you moved?

Did you still go to the same school, activities.

Did you still have contact with your birth family?

Did you still get to see your friends?

How often did you see your social worker?

Did your social worker/anyone else every talk about getting support around moving on, going to a counsellor etc.

Contact with foster family

Do you still see your old foster family?

If yes: what part do they play in your life?

Are you happy with your contact with your old foster family, would you like to see them more often, less often?

If no: would you like to see them?

Has anyone ever asked you would you like to see them?

If participant has more than one breakdown: Repeat the above for 2/3 key placement breakdown

Experience of Positive Placements

Can you tell me about your most positive placement?

Why was this/What made this a happy experience?

What else was going on for you at the time?

Future Hopes/Plans

What do you think you would like to happen for you in the future?

Do you ever worry about the future?
What do you think might help you to have a good future?

Is there anything I haven't asked you about your experience of placement breakdown that you think is important that I know?
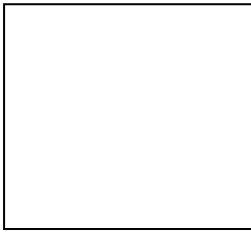
Appendix Four: **Placement History Timeline**

So now I just want to go through the different places that you've lived and what age you were when you lived there…This is so I can create a 'placement history' for you. If you can't remember some things that's OK - anything you can tell me at all would be brilliant.

So can you tell me about the first ever place you can remember living in? [Then go through each place since ('and where did you live straight after that?') specifically asking about whether care placements were relatives, foster care, residential care]

1.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____

2.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____

3.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____

4.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____

5.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____

6.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____
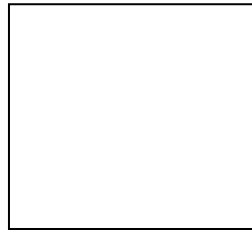
7.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____
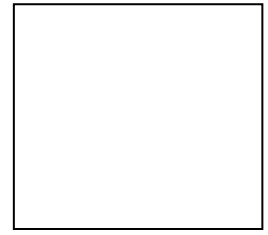
8.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____
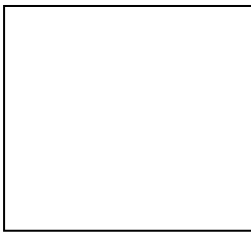
9.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____
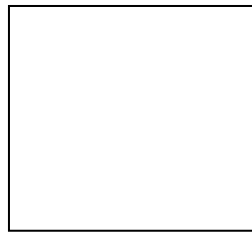
10.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____
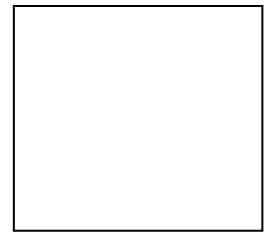
11.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____

12.

Age: _____

Other info: _____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix Five: Coding Categories

1) Access

2) Communication

3) Experience and Feelings of Breakdown

4) Positives

5) Overall Foster Care Experience

6) On-going role of disrupted foster carers

7) Ecological Issues (School, Friends)

8) Life after/ Impact of Breakdown

9) Placement Type (Relative/General Foster Care)

10) Respite

11) Influences on Placement

12) Narratives of Why

List of Support Services:

AHEAD (Association for Higher Education, Access and Disability)
(01) 4752386

Association for Children and Adults With Learning disabilities (& Dyslexic Association)
(01) 6790276

Aware
01 661 7211/ 1890 303 302

Bereavement Counselling Service
(01) 8391766

Bodywhys
(01) 2835126

Cari Foundation - Children At Risk in Ireland
1890 924 567

Cherish (Pregnancy support service)
(01) 6629212

Childline
1800 666 666

Console
(Low-cost one-on-one counselling service for anyone affected by suicide. Also run

therapeutic support groups and courses.)
1800 201 890

Crime Victims Helpline
Crime Victims Helpline is a National Helpline which offers support to victims of crime in Ireland.
If you are a victim of crime support is available by contacting :
Free Phone 116 006
Text on 085 1 33 77 11
Email:info@crimevictimshelpline.ie

Drugs Helpline

1800 459 459

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
1800 77 88 88

Gingerbread Ireland (Lone Parents and Children)
(01) 6710291

HIV Helpline

1800 459 459

Missing Persons Helpline
1800 616617

OANDA (Out and About Association)- supprting positive mental health

(01) 833 8252

Pieta House (counselling and support for suicide and self harm)
(01) 601 0000

Samaritans
1850 60 90 90

Solas (bereavement helpline for children)
(01) 4732110

Suicide Bereavement Support Group
(01) 8484789

Victim Support
1800 661 771

Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline
1800 341 900

1Life (24 hour Suicide Prevention Helpline)
1800 24 7 100/ Text: HELP 51444