



**Experiences of child protection officers working with children in foster care from
immigrant background in Stavanger, Norway**

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Abstract

A lot has been said about Barnevernet, the child protection agency in Norway and the foster care of children with immigrant backgrounds. However, we seem to know very little about the experiences of child protection officers supporting these children. Therefore, the study aimed to establish the experiences of child protection workers working with foster children from immigrant backgrounds. Specifically, to understand the nature of the support they provide, establish the challenges they face in doing so and explore their strategies.

Therefore, a qualitative study followed a social constructivist perspective and used a combination of a focus group discussion and one in-depth- interview. The participants were purposively chosen based on having at least two years of working experience as child protection officers. The selection also used snowballing for the focus group and convenience sampling for in-depth interviews, with the participants coming respectively from Norway's Rogaland and Oslo-Metropolitan regions. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide and analysed using thematic analysis.

Three main themes emerged from the data: i) We follow the law and guidelines, 2) Expectations as the basis of challenges and iii) Building understanding. Overall, the findings suggest that while child protection officers' work follows the law and guidelines, they try to build understanding to overcome challenges of expectations that arise mainly out of cultural differences. The findings also revealed that contrary to the negative public perception of child protection services, foster children seem to appreciate the support they get. Similarly, contrary to expectations, some foster children prefer to be placed in native Norwegian homes instead of similar immigrant cultural backgrounds. The implication is that child protection officers must be mindful of cultural differences and strive to match the needs of foster children with immigrant experience by showing empathy, exercising their discretion, and collaborating with all parties involved.

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1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Across countries, Child Welfare Services (CWS) are mandated to improve the lives of children and families facing adversity (Fylkesnes et al., 2018). Norwegian child welfare services are provided through the Barnevernet, a public agency responsible for child protection services (Baran & Jones, 2018). Although the CWS is sometimes used interchangeably with Child Protection Services (CPS), the two are different (Wilson et al., 2020). While CWS focuses on a preventive and early intervention approach that encourages partnership between social workers and families and provides supportive services to parents, CPS takes remedial and risk mitigation approaches (Juhasz, 2020). In theory, although the two are different, in practice, in the context of Norway, it is ideal to assume that the CPS is a subset of CWS (Baran & Jones, 2018). Thus, the goal is to take remedial action to protect the child from risks. The focus in this study is on child protection services.

Child protection services are guided by the Child Welfare Act (CWA) of 2021, which recognizes children as individuals with rights and as part of the family, making the services child-centric (Skivenes et al., 2015). The CWA operates under four principles which include (i) the best interest of the child, (ii) stability regarding the child's surrounding, (iii) the biological principles acknowledging parents as primary carers and (iv) the least intrusive level of intervention (Handulle, 2021). Child protection officers working in child protection agencies or child welfare system are responsible for securing children's rights by protecting them from risks through different mechanisms (Baran & Jones, 2018). The system intervenes within the family while ensuring the child's best interest through financial support and counselling services to the family (Kriz and Skivenes, 2014), to prevent maltreatment risks. Intervening within the family upholds the CWA principal number three which acknowledges parents as primary carers. It recognises the biological principle of parents and ensures that the child maintains family ties and environment (Mabille et al., 2021). Protecting the child may sometimes require placing them out of home in a residential home or foster home when parents cannot guarantee in-home care (Juhasz, 2020). Foster care protects children who are believed to be abused or neglected by placing them with kinship families or traditional foster family homes as per provisions of child welfare services and laws (Child Welfare Act, 2021). This study will focus on foster care.

The child protection system in Norway includes the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs and the County Social Welfare Board (Fylkesnemnda) which decides on any care orders (Picot, 2016). The department of child welfare services which is sometimes referred to as child protection department falls under the Norwegian directorate for children, youth, and family affairs. The child protection department is responsible for all aspects of child welfare institutions, foster care and other help measures (ibid). While the child protection authorities are responsible for the recruitment and training of foster home parents and the placement of foster children in care, the County social welfare board make decisions when it comes to care orders regarding children.

Globally and indeed in Norway many children come into contact with child welfare services every year, and there has been a growing trend of high representation of immigrant children in this (Norway Statistics, 2020). Norway has become increasingly ethnic and culturally diversified due to the many migrants living there (Guerriero et al., 2021). Although migration is not a new phenomenon in Norway, by the 20th century the country was still relatively characterised as both ethnically and culturally homogenous (ibid). The country had only an average immigrant population of 5% (Statistics Norway, 2021). However, following the EU enlargement in 2004 and the unrest in Africa and the middle east most notably the Libyan civil

war, the Syrian civil war and the 2014 -2017 Iraq war, Norway experienced its increased share of arrivals of immigrants (Slettebak, 2020). In 2016, the immigrant population had increased to 13.4% and by the year 2017, about 750 000 immigrants were living in Norway, mainly from Syria, Pakistan, Lithuanian, Afghanistan. Somalia, Polish and Swedish. According to statistics Norway (2021), the number of immigrants in Norway has reached 800 000 with 197 000 being Norwegians born from immigrants' parents in 2021. The implication of this development, therefore, is that ethnic and cultural diversities are now more significant than they were before because immigrant populations come along with their way of life regarding family customs, traditions, and culture. These customs and cultural traditions may be different and in conflict with those of Norway, which are based on universalism and equality associated with cultural homogeneity (Guerriero, 2021). Arguably the differences in culture of Norway and that of immigrants can be attributed to the higher representation of the children in contact with child protection services and placement in foster care.

The following concepts frame the study. According to the United Nations convention on the rights of a child (UNCRC, 1989) Article 1, a “child” is every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (Kabatanya, 2017). In Norwegian legal terms 'child' means every person under 18 years old and the term 'young people' is often used for people up to 25 years old. (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, 2016). Furthermore, a child with an immigrant background will be used to refer to all children born to immigrant parents; these could be children who migrated to Norway as well as those born in Norway from immigrant parents (Statistics Norway, 2019).

The “best interest of the child” is a guideline in the UNCRC which all the signatory countries use when making policies pertaining to protecting children (Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö, 2016).

Foster care (also known as out of home care) is a temporary service provided by the state for children who cannot live with their families (USA, 2023). Children may live with relatives (kinship foster care), or with unrelated parents (traditional foster care). In this study foster care will be used to refer to traditional foster care.

Child protection services will be used to refer to all child welfare services aimed at protecting children in the family or in foster care. Child protection officers therefore refer to any worker working in a child protection agency. These could be social workers, child welfare pedagogues i.e., social workers trained to work in all areas of child protection, and specialised educators (Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö, 2016).

1.1 Background

The child protection agency or Barnevernet is a public agency guided by the Child Welfare Act (CWA) of 2021, whose main goal is to protect children at risk. It is a family service system emphasising supportive measures and collaboration between social workers and families (Fylkesnes, 2018). Thus, while the family is responsible for the well-being and protection of the child, the government offers care support to the family to ensure this is done. This approach is however two sided, while offering support, the government also exercises control and discipline. When the family has failed to protect the child, the agency intervenes by placing the child in an out -of -home care facility such as institutional facilities/Foster care such as traditional family homes, when it is proved that parents cannot guarantee in-home care (Juhasz, 2020).

In-home-care services are provided to the families in their homes to prevent risks of maltreatment. These include a wide range of preventive in-home services such as parent counselling, week-end visitations, kindergarten leisure time activities and economic assistance (Fylkesnes, 2018). In contrast, out of home care services include institutional care and foster care depending on the situation for children perceived to be “at risk”. Foster care is a mechanism used for protecting children who are believed to be abused or neglected by placing them with either relatives or traditional family homes as per provisions of child welfare services and laws (Child Welfare Act, 2021).

Foster care has become a common phenomenon worldwide for protecting children and preserving families (Bald.et, al., 2022). For instance, in the US, it was reported that 5 per cent of children were placed in foster care at some point during their childhood (Rouland & Vaithianathan, 2018; Yi, Edwards, and Wildeman 2020). Another report showed that in 2020 approximately 37.4% of US children were in contact with Child Protective Services (CPS), and more than 250 000 children enter foster care each year (Johnson -Motoyama, 2022). In Sweden, it was reported that in 2020 about 19 400 children corresponding to 1 per cent were in foster care at some point (Akerman et al., 2022; National Board of Health and Welfare, 2021).

A similar trend has been reported in Norway (Dyrhaug, 2016; Ursin et al., 2022; Statistics Norway, 2020), more than 12 000 lived in foster homes and specialised institutions in 2019. According to a report by Statistics Norway (2020), in 2019 four out of five child welfare services (CWS) measures in Norway are in-home support and 17.9% of the children supported by CWS were out-of-home care. In 2021, the number of children receiving measures from child welfare services were 50 520 with 41789 receiving assistance measure while 8731 received care measure (Statistic Norway, 2023). Assistance measures are measures provided in form of support for the child within the family. In contrast care measures are protective measures which include removing children from risk environment and placing them in an institution or foster care. In Rogaland 618 children between the age of 0-17 were in foster care placement in 2021(ibid).

There are different types of foster homes in Norway, traditional foster homes, emergency foster homes, kinship foster homes, and family homes, the latter being foster homes that welcome children with specific needs (Picot, 2016). In a traditional foster home, a child is placed with a foster family appointed by the state usually for an extended period (Burns et al, 2017). Whereas emergency foster homes are often short-term and meant to provide immediate security and care for a child. Lastly, family or kinship foster care, a child will be placed with relatives.

While the above applies in general to foster care, there is an observation that children with an immigrant background are overrepresented when it comes to child protection services. For instance, in Norway, Statistics (2020) there is a growing trend of children with immigrant parents in contact with child protection service providers, whether at home or out of home, compared to the majority population. Similarly, studies in Norway by Dyrhaug (2016) observed that in 2015, 25 % of the children under the care of Child protection services were from immigrant backgrounds. Ursin et al (2022), also show that in 2019, 54,592 children and young people (0-22) were in contact with CPS, and 44,821 received help at home; from this number, 7199 were of immigrant background. According to the Norwegian statistics’ of 2022 aggregation profile on migrants’ children in foster care, representation showed that, of all children aged between 0-22 per 1000 children, 50% were first generation immigrants, 30% were Norwegian born to immigrant parents and 20% were native to Norway. This clearly shows

that of the children that encounter child protection services, a large number are from an immigrant background which means that they are also likely to be placed in foster care.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Several studies (Dyrhaug, 2016; Ursin et al., 2022), suggest that children with ethnic minority backgrounds, are overrepresented in Child protection services and are more likely to be placed in foster homes compared to the majority population. Due to their background, these children will likely face even more difficulties during the transition from their home, their stay in foster care. Brought up in one cultural context and now living in another, children are faced with the process of unlearning aspects of their culture and learning the values and customs of their new parents to expedite fitting in (Guerriero, 2021). They are conflicted about their position in the family, parenting styles and state involvement in their lives. A study by Arias (2016), concluded that Norwegian workers identified parenting approaches, culture, language barrier and lack of system knowledge as the main challenges when working with migrant families. Many children from immigrant background come from culturally collective families, for example children from African families and middle east countries. On the other hand, Norway has a child centric approach which focuses on the child as an individual with rights as opposed to collectivist values of cultures that see the child as part of a larger community (ibid). The implication of such differences is the discourse that arise when parents encounter child protection services on children and parenting in Norway (Hollekim, et al., 2016).

Arguably this can result in most of the children being taken away from their homes when the parents are seen as lacking in parental skills and capabilities or when they are seen to discipline their children in ways that are not acceptable in Norway. A problem that has arisen from the disparity between the Norwegian expectations of doing parenting is an overrepresentation of ethnic minority children in out of home care (Guerriero, 2012:12). The result is that Immigrant children are seen as victims of discrimination because they cannot have the same opportunities than Norwegians due to their parents' culture (Arias, 2016). They are affected by the system which disadvantage their parents and deem their family environment not conducive.

While this group deserves attention, most of the studies on foster care have focused on either transition from institutional care into adulthood (Nyikach et al., 2022) or follow-up on the performance of the children when they leave foster care (Bakketeig & Backe-Hansen, 2018). Also, some researchers have looked at young people in foster care and their levels of participation in decision making on issue that affect them (Fylkesnes, et al., 2021) and others on foster parents' or foster children's experiences of service providers (Larsen et al., 2020, Ellingsen et al., 2011).

However, most of these studies have not explored experiences of child protection officers working with foster children with immigrant background. Yet Fylkesnes et al, (2018) point to cultural gaps, language barriers, distrust, and bureaucratic structures that affect service provision to ethnic minorities. At the same time, child protection officers as street level bureaucrats in their daily practices (Kriz and Skivenes, 2014), are likely to devise means and ways to support these children while in care which can greatly help them. This means that child protection officers may use personal discretion as street-level bureaucrats to interpret policies in a way that helps them deal with dilemmas or conflicting situations they encounter in their work. This clearly shows a lack of knowledge on the nature of support provided by child protection officers to children with immigrant background, the challenges they face when doing so, and the strategies they use to address the challenges.

The Child Welfare Act (2021), points to the importance of securing adequate measures at the appropriate time (Picot, 2016). Arguably, understanding the experience and views of CPOs is important because they are responsible for ensuring and securing adequate measures that improve the stay of children in foster homes. Social workers advocate on behalf of and mediate between the clients and service providers and in this case between the foster parents and the children and link the clients to appropriate services (Lindal, 2021). Therefore, this paper intends to focus on the experiences of CPOs when working with children from immigrant background during the period of foster care.

1.3 Aim

This proposal aims to establish the experiences of child protection officers working with foster children from immigrant backgrounds.

1.4 Main research Questions

What are the experiences of child protection officers involved in foster care of children from an immigrant background?

1.4.1 Sub Research questions

1. What is the nature of the support child protection officers provide to children from immigrant background in foster care?
2. What challenges do child protection officers encounter in supporting children from immigrant background in foster care?
3. What strategies do child protection officers use to address their challenges ?

1.4.2 Significance of the study

The study on the experiences of CPOs in providing support to foster care for children with an immigrant background has implications for theory, practice and policy. For theory, studies have rarely examined the experience of CPOs working with foster children with immigrant backgrounds. As a result, there is a lack of knowledge from the CPO's perspective on the nature of the support they provide, the challenges they face and the strategies they use. Therefore, examining this phenomenon allows us to make s contribution to the existing literature and give directions for future research. At the practical level, the study will help with valuable information to guide CPOs on how they can improve the provision of their services to foster children and foster and biological parents. Similarly, the study will help policymakers with evidence based information to guide their policies for foster care and support interventions aimed at children with an immigrant background.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A literature review is a critical review of the existing knowledge used to support the research questions and the findings (Bryman, 2012, p. 102). This chapter reviewed existing literature on CPOs' experiences working with foster children of immigrant backgrounds. Specifically, the chapter explored literature on the nature of service support provided by CPOs, the challenges they face when placing children in foster care, and the strategies they use to address the challenges while delivering the services. While the literature review draws on the context of Norway, given the specific and situatedness of the nature of child protection services, the literature review also includes literature within the global context. Therefore, the existing gaps will be identified from the literature and used as a basis for the proposed research.

2.2 Nature of child protection services in Norway

Norway is one of the Scandinavian countries with a long tradition of providing welfare services for families (Kriz & Skivenes, 2014). It is typically categorized as a socially democratic welfare State (Esping-Andersen, 1999), due to the state's high involvement in ensuring all citizens are provided with the welfare services. The services are characterised by family sensitive and therapeutic approach, which offers a wide range of family support subsidised mainly by the tax system (Arias, 2016). The state plays a vital role in defamiliarization, and low stratification aimed at having a classless society that reduces inequality through equal rights and universalism (Kabatanya, 2017). Therefore, with equal opportunity and universalism principles at the heart of policies concerning children and families, the state regulates social service delivery through inclusive child and family protection services (Guerriero, 2021).

The Norwegian child protection services are also characterised as “family service system” because they emphasise on supportive measures and collaboration between social workers and the families (Kriz and Skivenes, 2014). A relationship based on shared responsibility and understanding is created by sharing childcare responsibilities with families by offering support such as kindergarten services and unemployment benefits to the parents. CPOs are expected to collaborate with families to develop interventions that not only protect the child, but also the family where the child belongs (ibid). Child protection services in Norway are also known to be “child centric”. Under the child welfare Act of 2021, children are recognized as independent individuals with rights of their own which should be recognised as such and their “best interest” be considered at all times (Skivenes et al., 2015). In the child welfare Act (2021), article 6-3 children are recognized as significant, should be given information and an opportunity for their opinion to be heard because they should not just be recipients but also contributors to what happens to them. Friberg and Bjornset (2019), argue that the Norwegian welfare system is seen as invasive compared to other countries due to its high ambition to regulate families through protection and control.

The protection of children applies to all children regardless of their background, religion, nationality, or residential status which is consistent with the Article 2 of the UNCRC (1989), which obligates countries to protect children residing in their country (Clark et. al, 2020). The state does this by providing a wide range of preventive in-home services as well as out-of-home services for children perceived to be at risk (Fylkesnes et al 2018). In-home services include family Services such as compulsory public school system, medical services, and childcare services such as kindergarten, child financial support and leisure activities (Friberg

and Bjornset (2020). Out of home care include placing a child in out-of-home institutions or foster homes when they can no longer be with their families due to risks (ibid). Foster care is the preferred option for long-term out-of-home care in Norway, as in the other Nordic countries (Skivenes and Søvig, 2016), as it provides the child with a home environment.

If after investigations, the Child protection services finds a reason for a coercive intervention, such as placing the child in foster care, an application for a care order will be submitted to the County Social Welfare Boards (CB), which then decides on the matter after a court like proceeding (Skivenes & Søvig, 2017). The board consist of a panel of three decision makers, a jurist with judge qualifications, an expert member, and a lay member (Skivenes & Tonheim, 2017). This simply means that while child protection services (CPS) in Norway are responsible for the welfare of the child and placing them in care, they work in conjunction with the county social welfare board (Løvlie, 2022), who are mandated to decide on the question of care order, whether or not to grant permission to place the child in an institution or foster care.

Ideally care orders should be temporary and should aim for family reunification within a shortest possible time, however, some children cannot be reunified with their birth parents for various reasons (Burns et al, 2017; Farmer, 2018). Such children are placed in institutions or with foster families until they reach the age of 18 or 23 years. The Norwegian legislation require that young people can receive support from child welfare services or continue foster care until they turn 23 years if they consent to this, and when aftercare is in their 'best interest' (Oterholma & Paulsen, 2018). In most cases children in foster care have either experienced maltreatment, abuse, or neglect, which may cause adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Narayan, 2021). ACEs are potentially traumatic events that can have lasting adverse effects on the child's development particularly before the age of 18 years (Areba, et al., 2021). These experiences affect children into adulthood if not addressed. Therefore, it is the role of the child protection officers to ensure that the process of foster care, does not put the child in a worse situation than before which can affect the child throughout their life.

Many factors such as age, cultural background, and reasons for removal from home come into play when deciding the ideal family for the child, (Helland & Skivenes, 2021). The above factors also determine the kind of services provided. This is because the kind of social service support, they receive during this period is vital in enhancing their positive resilience in overcoming the challenges throughout their development stages (Pinheiro, 2021). With regard to children with immigrant background, their protection and support is backed by the article 2 of the UNCRC (1989), therefore, CPOs are required by law to use their discretion to tailor support services accordingly in order to meet their needs.

Child Protection Services (CPS) are responsible for the implementation of foster care and mandated to continually monitor and follow-up foster care placements as required by child Welfare Act of 2021 (Fylkesnes et al., 2021). This means that CPOs must conduct regular visits and follow up to establish the unmet needs of the child and the foster parents. Services also include counselling services for both the child and the parents, health services, education, and mediating conflicts in the foster home. When children are placed in foster home, the foster parent take responsibility of the child in their care. CPOs support them by facilitating access to service that meet the foster child's basic needs (Meetoo, 2020). Collaborating together, CPOs and foster parents ensure the child adapts to the new home, the child continue with their education and has access to health care as required.

2.3 Challenges

Gomez Garcia, et al., (2022), suggest that child protection officers encounter several challenges in their daily interactions with service users. Firstly, they face ethical and professional dilemmas concerning removals and placing of children in care institutions. Specifically, it is challenging for them to balance between contradictory reports and expectations given that removing a child from their family homes and placing them in foster care is highly debated (Bald et al., 2022). Thus, one can argue that social protection officers are faced with a dilemma between upholding or balancing the best interest of the child while preserving the family as guided by the biological principle where parents as primary carers (Kabatanya, 2017). On one hand, uphold professional ethics, while on one hand the need to uphold social work values and principles for example self-determination of the child or the parent in charge.

Secondly, depending on the settings and characteristic of the child, different challenges may emerge. Taking children out of their natural home into a different home poses a challenge on their development process (Pinheiro, et al., 2021). Even though it seems to be the best option in some situations, because it involves the critical separation of children from their relatives. Children experience disruption in their lives due to change of environment and may at times not even fully understand why they are being separated. Using life course perspective as a reference point, foster children experience their lives in patterns of placement trajectories made up of entries, exits, and changes in placement laid out in temporal orders with time associated with age (Wulczyn, 2020). These constant changing patterns may affect the child's development according to Bowlby's theory of attachment. Due to lack of stable relations that they can trust, children will develop insecure attachment and are unable to trust anyone enough to form social and emotional relations (Guerriero, 2021). The lack of a secure attachment affects the establishment of a good relationship which is a basis for a workable intervention.

While the above applies to foster care in general, peculiar challenges arise in the context of children with immigrant background. For instance, the United Nations (UN) children's committee has raised several concerns as to whether removing children from their families is in the child's best interest especially in minority populations which include immigrants. The process may lead to children losing connection with their native culture and language while in custody Committee on the Rights of the Child (2018). The change in the environment means children have to adjust to a new family and totally new culture. Thus, while this may not be a bad thing, they may end up losing their identities, thereby end up facing a double bind (Handulle, 2021) especially if they are not in contact with their biological parent. Double binds often take place when elements of two incompatible communicative frames situationally intersect (Trova, 2016). For instance, in this case, when a foster child has to learn new cultural values of the foster parents in order to fit in, while still trying to maintain their cultural identity.

Ylvisaker, et al., (2015) highlighted differences in social problems affecting ethnic minorities and indigenous population as based on cultural differences, the subordinate position of minorities brought about due to uneven power relations in the Nordic societies. Arias (2016) also confirms in the comparative study on Norway and UK by Kriz and Skivenes (2010), that parenting approaches, culture, language barrier and lack of knowledge of the system creates challenges for child protection officers when working with minority populations in Norway. Cultural differences of minorities have led to immigrants being referred to as the cultural 'others' because they are different from the Norwegians (Rugkåsa & Ylvisaker, 2021). This categorization may determine the kind of services they receive or the relationship they have with child protection officers. Categorization is a process that is used to divide groups into

entities of sameness to create order and reduce complexity during service delivery (Erikson & Nissen, 2017).

While categorization is necessary especially when designing services for certain groups of service users (i.e., minority children), it can also position service users as lacking (Fylkesnes, et al, 2018). In most cases, because of their negative past experiences with child protection agencies, ethnic minorities may see the agency as a controlling and invasive institution instead of a help system. (Friberg and Bjornset, 2020). Minority children for instance will not report their maltreatment for fear that since their parents are immigrant and lacking, they will be taken away from home and placed in foster care. Therefore, CPOs encounter distrust from minority populations due to fear, this leads to isolation and avoidance of assistance and cooperation that the workers need to establish with the service users (Arias, 2016).

Language barrier due to immigrant limited abilities creates serious communication limitations which requires child protection officers to use interpreters during their interaction with minorities (Alaggia, 2015). This according to the CPOs, result in loss of time, trust, and accurate assessment information needed to make informed decisions for both the CPOs and the service users. The other area of challenge is the minority lack of knowledge about system which affects the ability of the client to seek, negotiate for the services they need (ibid).

Another challenge emanates from assuming that “one size fits all” nature of child protection services. The Norwegian social democratic welfare state is based on the principles of universality and equality on the wider social construction of society (Esping Andersen, 1990). With these principles guiding policies on children and families, Norwegian child protection laws are characterised as being cultural and colour blind (Guerriero, 2021). The focus is more on protecting the child according to what is expected of Norwegian standard, without acknowledging differences and diversities that exist (ibid). The child protection Act, (2021), guides CPOs to treat every child the same regardless of where they come from in order to not exclude anyone. In the Norwegian culture, adults show love, respect children, and encourage children to expressive themselves on their goals (Kabatanya, 2017). However, in contrast, immigrant parents from different cultural backgrounds emphasise collectivistic cultural values that see the child as part of a larger community, Arias (2016). Emphasising communal goals and a child is expected to adjust their goals to maintain harmony, something not in the best interest of the child. one can assume that it is this approach that has contributed to high numbers of immigrant children in foster care as suggested by Kriz and Skivenes (2010). Because equality is cast as sameness, differences between ethnic population and minority populations will be under communicated and so will their needs.

These findings are important because they highlight issues that may arise when workers conceptualise users, associating them for example children of migrant parents as coming from a point of not understanding the system or having been parented differently can result in categorising them as such (Eriksson, 2017), making it difficult to create a working relationship that benefit both of them. However, if these differences are not addressed or given acknowledgement child protection workers will continue facing the same cultural related challenges when working with minority children.

2.4 Strategies

To address the above challenges, child protection officers use the following Strategies that address ethical dilemmas, cultural issues that affect providers and user relationship and

strategies that deal with challenges brought about institution systems. As child protection services guidelines state, the main task of CPS is to ensure that children and young people living under conditions that can harm their health and development receive necessary help at the right time (Child welfare Act, 2021).

According to Ylvisaker & Rugkåsa (2021), Child protection workers are constantly weighing the potential consequences of their choices and decision on the service users. Balancing between the professional decisions against ethical codes sometimes require making decisions based on personal discretion. In his book *Street-level bureaucracy* of 1980, Michael Lipsky refers to child professional workers as street level bureaucrats when they use their own views and perceptions in interpreting laid down government principles in constituting public policy actions (Kriz & Skivenes, 2014). Sometimes policies or principles governing decision making processes maybe vague or contradictory. for example, the possible contradiction between the principle of the best interest of the child which should be a fundamental consideration in actions and decisions that affect children (NMCE, 2016), and family preservation which is the primary care giver of the child. According to Kriz & Skivenes (2014), CPOs use their personal discretion they enjoy as street-level bureaucrats to decide if removing the child from their family is in their best interest while considering the situation at that particular time.

Foster care has been the most preferred option in Norway when placing children out of their home because it provides a family environment network for the child. A family environment consist of the foster parents and the child working together with the CPOs. In this set up, Communication is considered important for smooth service delivery. Because some immigrant children may not have adequate language competence and knowledge of the Norwegian system, Service providers use interpreters and cultural brokers to bridge the communication gap (Pang et al., 2020). Some strategies focus on improving relationships between foster carers and children in their care, while other strategies focus on the relationship between foster children and child protection workers (Hutchings et al., 2017). These relationship-focused strategies are informed by a body of literature highlighting the importance of securing a supportive relationship in foster care for better outcomes (Midgley et al., 2021).

Scholars that advocate for this view propose that the relationship between child protection officers and clients should be based on closeness and trust, since they are prerequisites for the professionals to be able to achieve an adequate understanding of the client's needs, desires, and situations (Lindal, 2021). However, the relationship based social work requires that social workers perceive and respond to the uniqueness of each client, (Lindal, 2018). Every client a child protection officer meet, is different and unique in their own ways. Immigrant children in foster care have different experiences and cultural backgrounds (Rugkåsa & Ylvisaker 2021), and as such the trust and closeness from CPOs will only come about if the relationship is established and reciprocal. Lindal (2021), says when clients or service users feel comfortable enough to confide in the case worker then trust is built.

A conceptual study conducted by Lindal (2021) in Sweden on the relationship between foster children and their child welfare workers, emphasised building relationship between foster children and social workers as a basis for understanding the kind of support the children may need. Using the theory of recognition as its departure in understanding relationships in social work, the study focused on the general interpersonal relationships and how these relationships are affected by factors on different levels (Ridley et al.,2016). The theory of recognition is based on the traditional critical theory developed by theorist Habermas and Adorno in Frankfurt Germany (Linda, 2021). The theory suggests that in today's individualised society people have

a need to obtain a sense of autonomous value which makes self-realization important. This requires that the individual experience recognition through love, rights, and solidarity.

Social protection workers need to establish a relationship with foster children they work with to build the trust and care required for the intervention and support to be effective. This relationship recognizes children as actors who require care and love, have rights to have a say and can be part of the relationship working in solidarity with the protection workers. Through care and love, the children can build stable health attachment and trust with workers (Lindahl & Bruhn, 2017, 2018). The relationship should also recognise the rights of the children as individuals with legal rights as well as unique and specific needs (ibid). This means that within this relationship CPOs should recognise and acknowledge the fact that foster children with immigrant backgrounds have unique needs that may require different kinds of support, i.e., the need to address their ACEs and also know the kind of support to give (Liming et al., 2021). Children's right to participate has been particularly high on the political agenda in Norway in the last decade, they operationalised the right of the child to be heard in questions that concern them, and due weight to be attached to their views following their age and development (Falch-Erickson & Skivenes, 2019). Emphasising providing children in foster care with the information and opportunity to express their views freely and take the children's views and opinions into account in decision making (Fylkesnes, et al., 2021). This requires CPOs to create opportunities to work together in solidarity with foster children (Lindal, 2021). Fostering social appreciation and collaboration with the child, is crucial in building self-esteem and agency because children will not only be spectators but part of the process in coming up with solutions to their problems.

By nature, social work is a collaborative profession. According to Przeperski & Taylor, (2020), decisions are outcomes of collaborative processes with other professions and organisations or different individuals carrying out different roles. In their qualitative study in Poland, Przeperski and Taylor focused on decisions in the context of cooperation between helping professions. The study recognises that problems clients face requires various professions or individuals with different roles to address. They identified family assistants, counsellors for organisational foster care, family probation officers, voluntary probation officers, family mediators and curators as helping families in difficult times in Poland, as well as roles familiar in other countries such as family judges, social workers and school teachers. The study concluded that there is need for leadership in partnership working built on an understanding of the realities of the practice environment and the specific responsibility of each profession and organization.

Like stated earlier the foster care process require the cooperation and collaboration of the child, foster parents, CPOs as well as biological parents. it is in the best interest of the child's welfare that these stakeholder collaborate together to ensure the child is provided for. The role of foster parents can be seen in the following study conducted on experiences of foster parents on using child mental health and welfare services in Norway which highlighted the importance of CPOs to understand the experiences of foster parents as crucial agents for enabling positive change in foster children (Larsen et al., 2020). The study observed that foster families often have extensive contact with health and welfare services because children have complex needs such as mental disorders, medical and dental problems (ibid). Further the study indicated that most foster parents were satisfied with the health and welfare services received, however, many foster parents felt insufficiently involved in decisions regarding the child. The foster parents also expressed concerns on lack of continuity within care services and lack of sufficient

information about the child from CPS. Furthermore, foster parents expressed a need for more support and sensitivity from caseworkers (Larsen et al., 2020). The nature of social service support should be in such a way that it involves the principal carers to help them understand and get involved in the process of helping the child. According to Tonheim & Iversen (2018), it is important to involve the foster parents to understand the background of the child to avoid increasing the risk of placement breakdowns.

The above scenario begs an answer on how far a child protection worker should go in terms of offering support services to the foster children. Social protection officers operate within professional guidelines that are stipulated by law, however in some cases it seems more is expected of them if we have to obtain better results in the interventions.

2.5 Summary

While there is a consensus by researchers and policy makers that exposure to foster care has an impact on child development, this is highly debated. On one hand, Bald et al., (2022), states that children who have spent time in foster care are particularly vulnerable; they are seven times more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety in comparison to similar children who did not spend time in foster care. Similarly, Doyle, (2013) noted that, compared to similar children who were not placed in foster care, former foster children exhibited higher rates of delinquency in adolescence. Conversely Gross (2020) found that foster care placement reduced future maltreatment, increased school attendance, and improved math scores (Gross, 2020)

2.6 Theoretical framework

2.6.1 Introduction

Theories are an important aspect of every research as they help explain the problems being addresses and the phenomenon of interest. Bryman (2012:20) explains that theory “provides a backcloth and the rationale for the research that is being conducted”. The research will draw on the acculturation, life course and empowerment theories to establish the experiences of child protection workers with foster care placement of children with migrant parents.

2.6.1 Acculturation theory

Migration is one of the social problems that has been known to not only disrupt family unions but also affect children the most. Most of the immigrants come from conflict torn countries, and they experience traumatic events during their flight which affect their psycho-social wellbeing or mental health (Abebe et al., 2014; Ascher et al., 2021; Nielsen, 2022;). When they arrive in a new country, they are also faced with challenges of upholding a meaningful new life as they try to adjust to the new environment.

Parents who are principal care givers are not exempt from the stressors associated with these conflicts (Wood, et al.,2020). Parents are affected by the process of acculturation due to change in social economic and living conditions in the new country. Because parents are stressed, it increases the risk of child neglect and maltreatment within the family environment which in turn affect the quality of care giving and parenting(ibid). Bjornberg (1991), states that family functioning is affected because parents are “Parenting in transition” due to the need to adapt to the expectations of the host country while transitioning from their own culture. Because the whole process increases the risk of child neglect, children may end up in foster care.

Central to this study is the acculturation theory, considering that migration processes give rise to challenges when migrants navigate life in a new society. These challenges affect the family unit especially children when they experience disruption and separation (Nielsen, 2022). According to Schwartz & Unger (2017), acculturation is defined as cultural change initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. According to Berry, (2005), this change is a dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes occurs due to contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. He further states that, at the group level, it involves changes in structure and institutions and in cultural practices, while at individual level it involves changes in the person's behaviour. Similarly, Berry (2017), confirms that as people move from one country to another they come in contact with different cultures and a process of cultural change ensues. Therefore, immigrants are confronted with two crucially pressing dimensions, either to maintain their cultural identity or learn the new culture of the host countries (Guerreiro et al.,2021).

People achieve this through what Berry (2005), terms acculturation strategies. He says an individual or group can choose to use either of the following strategies: Assimilation, Separation, Marginalization, and Integration. According to him assimilation is when an individual chooses to do away with their heritage culture and gets absorbed into the dominant culture society. Sometimes an individual can maintain their cultural identity and avoid interacting with other cultures, and then separation occurs. It is also possible that some individuals will have no interest in their heritage culture for personal reasons, and little interest in learning the other culture maybe because of exclusion and discrimination, then marginalization is defined. Finally, integration is achieved when there is interest in maintaining one's cultural heritage and the other culture in the host society.

However, Berry (2005, p8), argues that the dominant group often imposes constraints so that individuals are not entirely free to act according to their preferences. Guerreiro et al., (2021, p13), also agree to this statement and state that, although acculturation is said to be bi-directional in principle, the process tends to induce more change on the acculturating group in real life. In relation to children in foster care, one would argue that in as much as the children are expected to learn the Norwegian culture, there is also a need for CPOs to have cultural competence when working with the children. Children can not run away from the process of acculturation especially when living with foster parents of Norwegian culture, it is therefore necessary that children are allowed to uphold their cultural identity. This is also supported by the UNCRC (2018), of allowing the children to maintain their native culture and language and also the Norwegian Child Welfare Act (2021), 1-8, which states that CPS must give due consideration to the child's ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious background in its work in all phases of the case or life course. Nyikachi (2022), further affirms that in a multicultural society, cultural awareness and competence are integral parts of service delivery. Arguably, this requires the CPOs and foster parents to activate their critical and reflexive competence, as well as their skills (Fylkesnes et al., 2018).

2.6.2 Life course approach

Life course perspective (LCP) is a theory that looks at factors that affect a person's development over their life course. According to Hutchison (2019:1), biological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors interact independently or cumulatively to produce great diversity in life course journeys and shape people's lives across family generations. The LCP or life course theory has its roots in the 1960s. Glen Elder Jr was one of the early authors who wrote about the theory when he used it to study the impact of the 1930s great depression on the individual and family pathways (Elder, 1974). Elder, (1998) and Shanahan, (2000) identifies the following themes in the LCP approach. The events people experience are bound

by social historical and geographical location, linked lives or social ties to others, timing of events, heterogeneity, human agency, and personal control and inter play of human lives.

Many disciplines recognise and recommend the LCP as better situated in addressing human diversity in development as compared to the traditional life cycle model which assumes universal fixed sequence stages of development (Hutchison, 2005). The life course theory advocates that the sequence of socially defined events and roles individuals or families encounters over time through social institutions and organizations shape trajectories and developmental pathways that an individual go through (Guerriero, et al.,2021).These sequences do not take universal linear pathway, instead they may include multiple turning points of predictable and unpredictable encounters that can take an individual forward and backwards and requires the individual to adjust and learn new things in order to cope with the changes (Wheaton and Gotlib,1997).Therefore, LCP is better situated in highlighting complex experiences of immigrant families during their migration journeys and beginning new lives in countries of different culture.

According to WHO (2018), if a person experiences some traumatic events early in life, or at a point in time in life, these experiences may affect them later in life. These traumatic stressors experienced early in life are collectively termed Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Wood et al., 2020). Research shows that, children who have been exposed to Adverse childhood experiences such as abuse, war, or separation from parents, are more likely to experience cumulative adversity throughout their life span (Liming et al.,2021). Apart from the traumatic migration experience, which affect children and parents with an immigrant background, the child transition from the parents' home into a foster family, an experience also referred to as a turning point in a child's (Hojer & Sjöblom 2014). As woods et al., (2020) puts it "at the time a child with immigrant background is placed in foster care, they have most likely experienced multitude of adverse childhood experiences".

Therefore, the role of social work intervention is to help children and families to get their life course trajectories back on track to ensure recovery (Hutchison, 2019). As LCP hold the promise of bridging the micro and macro worlds (ibid), Social workers intervene in the family by ensuring that the child's is protected (micro), and the family unit is not disrupted(macro) (Sulimani-Aidan and Feldma,2021), the principle which is in the best interest of the child.

The theory also acknowledges that individuals and families develop and evolve in cultural and historical context and that families change and adapt in order to synchronise their lives (Hutchison, 2019). LCP also recognizes that through time and sequences of events, people will construct their reality which shape how they perceive things and relationships around them. Social workers should identify the immediate support the family needs in order to prevent a disruption of the unit. It is required to first intervene by strengthening the family in order to ensure the child remains in the family (NMCE, 2016: CWA, 2021).

2.6.3 Empowerment theory

The theory of empowerment has been widely used in social work and other social science disciplines because of its emphasis on giving a voice to clients through participation and collaboration with social service agencies. Psychologist Julian Rappaport introduced the concept of empowerment to social work in 1984 and described it as a mechanism by which people, institutions and communities gain mastery over their lives (Guerriero, et, al.,20221). This means acquiring capacity to make decisions on matters affecting one's life. Emancipatory and participatory social work practice emphasizes empowering clients in the help process (Philips, 2018; Flanagan, 2020).

In particular, the empowerment theory looks at three dimensions, namely personal, relational, and collective empowerment. According to Zimmermann (2000), empowerment at the individual level is a process where individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals, a sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship between their efforts and life outcomes. It entails the ability of an individual to confront internalised oppressions. Relational empowerment is created through the relationships that a person forms with others and be able to negotiate and influence decision making in that relationship; while collective empowerment entails combined power and decision of individuals (Guerriero, et al., (2021).

Social work practice views empowerment not only through the process of empowering those oppressed by the oppressors, but by also addressing structures that limit individuals to access resources to better their lives. Borrowing from the critical pedagogy Paulo Freire who coined the term conscientisation in which he illustrates an analogue of teacher student relationship where the student is treated as a co-creator of knowledge and not just a passive learner (Guerriero et al.,2021). This requires CPOs to involve the children in the process of creating interventions that help them. Further, the social work approach to empowerment goes further by linking clients to available resources through awareness, mediating and advocating on their behalf (ibid). In this context therefore social workers should too be mindful of the authority they carry with them, so that it does not diminish their client's agency and level of participation. It is expected that social workers build rapport of mutual respect and treat people as experts in their own lives to increase their sense of agency thereby empowering users meaningfully (Freund and Band-Winterstein, 2015; Wilson et al.,2020).). Service users are better placed to decide what can work for them; what service providers need to do is to tap into their strengths when coming up with solutions. Thus, service providers interact with service users on the process of service provision by collaborating with them and ensuring they participate in the process and also take part in innovating and co-creating the services (Larsen & Hean,2021; Hean et al.,2015; Hean, et al., 2017; and Lahtien et al.,2018).

3.0 CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction And Overview

In this chapter, I give detailed methodological choices used for the study. The chapter begins with the research paradigm that underpins the study follows. Then the methodological approach to the research will be discussed, followed by the research design, which will look at the participants selected, the data collection methods used and the analysis process. The chapter will lastly discuss the ethical considerations in the study as well as the limitation encountered during the research life cycle or process.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Our beliefs and philosophical assumptions influence how we choose a problem or theory to explore, including the paradigm and the research positionality (Lincoln & Guba,1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The proposed study,s research paradigm will take a Social Constructivist approach often described as interpretivist (Bryman and Bell, 2016). It focuses on how individuals form their perceptions and subjective meanings of their experinces, and how they make sense of them to change or construct their situation or everyday practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.24). Often these subjective meanings are negotiated historically and socially over

a period of time as people pass on cultural norms through interaction with others (hence social construction) (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative researcher relies on the participant's views of the situation to bring out their constructed meanings. Therefore the social constructivist researcher generates or inductively develops a theory through the patterns that emerge when employing more open-ended questioning and listening to the "processes" of interaction among individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.3 Research Positionality

Researchers should also be aware that while they interpret their study participants, their background and position influence how they interpret their experiences (Bryman, 2016, p.31). The positionality of the researcher can influence the process and outcome of the research. This is because they, too, have their values, belief systems, position, and opinions on the same issue they are studying (Dodgson, 2019). This affects the objectivity of the research, and therefore there is a need for reflexivity throughout the research process. Reflexivity is a concept in which the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences they bring to a qualitative research study (Creswell, 2013). It is an interactional process that changes over time through repeated awareness, reflection, and action about the researcher's and participants' similarities and differences (The & Lek, 2018, p.522).

Being aware of the influence you bring as an insider or an outsider helped me deal with mine and that of my participants. The insider-outsider position helps the researcher identify the similarities and differences shared with the participant (Dodgson, 2019). I was an insider occupying a social worker position with an understanding of working with families and children, similar to my participants. I was also an outsider by nature, an immigrant student with little knowledge of Norwegian cultural practices and no experience working with foster care children. Even though this gave me an element of objectivity, it also positions me to see the whole process through the lens of a minority person with some prejudices and assumptions. This awareness required me to turn back the lens back onto myself, as Berger (2015, p.220) recommends, to recognise my situatedness within the research and the effect it may have on my participants, the questions I ask and how I make the interpretation.

The FGD was held at the participant's workplace, which provided a familiar environment for them. During my introduction, I mentioned why I was conducting that particular research and that, being a social worker myself, I was fully aware of the experiences of working with children and families, though not in the context of Norway. This gave participants a feeling of understanding of the similarities of professional values, as I observed their nodding and smiles. The researcher's positionality requires the continued focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity in creating knowledge by creating a balance between personal and others (Dodgson, 2019).

3.4 Research Approach

This study aims to explore and develop an understanding of child protection officer's experiences when working with children of immigrant background in foster care. A Qualitative design is therefore helpful in this study because according to Denzin & Lincoln (2011), it involves conducting research in its natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret a phenomenon in terms of meaning that people bring with them. Bryman (2016), also defines qualitative research as a method of inquiry employed to understand the social world through examining how it is interpreted by the research participants. Qualitative research is conducted when little is known about the problem or a phenomenon under study (ibid). This qualitative study will be based on a generic approach. Also known as a basic qualitative approach, it is not

guided by an explicit or established set of philosophical assumptions (Kahlke, 2014). According to Kostere & Kostere (2021), generic qualitative research is a methodology that seeks to understand human experience by taking a qualitative stance and using qualitative procedures. Percy et al., (2015) indicates that generic, basic or indeed interpretive research is used when any of the traditional qualitative designs, will not be suitable for the topic or will not provide everything needed for the topic. Generic qualitative research aims to understand human experiences by using qualitative procedures in data collection (Kostere & Kostere, 2021). If a researcher wants to explore people's experiences on a particular topic, quantitative research (statistics) will not provide complete information. Instead conversations or discussions coupled with clarifications will give the researcher the participants' perceptions and meanings on the topic (Elzig & Amed, 2021). This is because the main goal of qualitative research is to view the social world through the eyes of the people being studied for instance their experiences (Bryman and Bell, 2016). Their lived experiences help to understand how they form meaning of their everyday interactions with service users (Creswell, 2013) and how these meanings shape and influence interventions.

3.4.1 Research Design

A research design is a logical plan that links your research questions, the data to be collected and the strategies for analyzing data so that the study findings address the research questions (Yin, 2016, p8). Semi structured interviews such as Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) and In-depth interviews are used to obtain such kind of data. These are a form of Semi structured interviews comprising of closed and open-ended questions as the researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics (themes) to be covered, but the interviewee still has a great leeway in deciding how to answer (Bryman and Bell, 2016). A focus group discussion is a relatively small group of focused individuals gathered presumably because they share some common views (Yin, 2016). They are gathered together to contribute to an open discussion with the researcher moderating the whole discussion. In this case, a FDG of four participants from a municipality in Rogaland region was conducted.

Similarly one in-depth interview with a participant from a municipality in the Oslo metropolitan region was also conducted. In-depth interviews is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting an intensive individual interview in order to explore details on a particular situation (Boyce & Naele, 2006). In most cases this technique is favoured when the topic under discussion requires high levels of anonymity and confidentiality which cannot be discussed in a group (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008).

FDGs are very flexible and allows the researcher to ask questions that require clarification, this in turn generate detailed information from the participants (Handulle, 2021). Apart from providing space for participants to express themselves FDGs, provide an opportunity to have participants who have common experiences together discussing a particular topic (Lune & Berg, 2017)..

While FDGs helps in bringing out opinions and beliefs about the topic through interactions of participants, in-depth interviews help to explore personal experiences on the particular topic (Lambert & Loisselle, 2008). Compared to a FDG, an in-depth interview can bring out true opinions of the individual which are not influenced by the group's opinions. While in FDGs interactions between participants are very useful in generating data, there is a possibility of straying away from the questions. In contrast, an in-depth interview set up ensures focus (Baillie, 2019). However In-depth interviews also have their own pitfall such as the possibility

of bias, due to the participant,s personal interest in the topic and limited information especially when the participant is not sure about a particular issue raised (Boyce & Neal, 2006).

Therefore the two techniques provided both information on the experiences of child protection officers in broad way as well as in a more detailed way.

3.5 Participant selection

Participants were selected from two different municipalities. The approach helped to ensure considerable variation significant for research quality (Swtermo et al.,2021). The participants were purposefully selected because of their familiarity and experience with the phenomenon under study. According to Creswell (2013), the inquirer selects individuals or sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study.

Further, the recruitment approach used snowballing for the focus group and convenience sampling for the in-depth interview participant. Snowballing is whereby a researcher relies on a gatekeeper or someone who knows and can refer potential participants. In contrast, convenience sampling refers to the flexibility of getting someone through an easy way that serves time and resources, and the potential participants are accessible to the researcher (Yin, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, following the snowballing approach I emailed the project information to six municipalities in Rogaland, requesting them for research participants from the child protection department. I also made follow up calls to try and convince them to take part. I also spoke to acquaintances and professors to introduce me to the heads of child protection offices or in the municipalities. I got positive response only from one municipality which informed me through the gatekeeper that 4 participants had agreed to the focus group interview to be conducted physically at the office premises. The gate keeper become my focal person and become instrumental in organizing the meeting.

However, since I had initially wanted to do focus groups only and managed to convene one. I complemented this approach with one in-depth interview. Therefore, following convenience sampling, I approached a child protection officer I met during my exchange programme in Sweden who works in a municipality in the Oslo Metropolitan region. According to Creswell (2013, p157), the sample size in qualitative research is not only to study a few sites or individuals (FGDs), but also to collect extensive details about each site or individual (in-depth). This is because the intention in qualitative research is not to generalise the information but rather to elucidate that particular or specific issue. I was able to interview 5 participants in total, 4 through FGDs and one through the in-depth interview as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Participants social demographic characteristics

Type of interview	Participants	Region	Sex	Position	Experience
Focus Group	P1	Rogaland	Female	Profession Consultant	13 years
	P2		Female	Case Worker	12 years
	P3		Female	Case worker	2 years
	P4		Male	Social worker	15 years
In-depth	P1	Oslo	Female		6 years

3.6. Data Collection

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi structured interviews were used to allow interaction between the participants and the researcher and also between participants themselves. Bryman (2016) affirms that they encourage more exploration and guarantee that participants are not guarded. Data was collected through one focus group and one in-depth interview. The focus group discussion (FGDs) was conducted from child protection agency office and took 1 hr 15 minutes. While the in-depth interview was conducted online and lasted 50 min. Using the same interview guide (see appendix 1), the questions were designed in such a way that they did not necessarily follow a specific order, but the responses from the interviewee provided follow up questions. An interview guide according to Yin, (2016) usually contains a small subset of key topics considered relevant to a given interview. To enhance discussions, I ensured that the debate was stimulated while at the same time sticking to the theme under discussion. The focus group helped with the quality of data due to the fact that participants who were not very comfortable expressing certain terms in English were able to utilize the knowledge of the other participants in the group. For example translating Norwegian terms into English language, means of engaging with the family that could be regarded as priorities.

During in-depth interview, I observed that the participant was able to speak freely on issues that include professional relations between workers and, workers and children. Topics that could have been a bit uncomfortable if they were discussed in a group especially that it involves children with immigrant background.. As asserted by Baillie (2019), that including individual interviews within an overall focus group is necessary though a pragmatic decision as it provides both wide and in-depth data.

3.7 Data Analysis

3.7.1 Transcription

Data collected from qualitative research is usually broad and requires a rigorous process of preparing, managing, and organizing it. The whole process of analysing begins from the time the data is collected in form of written notes or recording from interviews. The process requires planning ahead with regard to instrument to be used to collect the data. For this study the interview conversation from the FGDs were obtained through a recorder and taking notes for follow up questions, while the in-depth interview was recorded on teams meeting and recorder as a back-up. I then transcribed the data into verbatim notes word by word, while noting pauses, agreements, or disagreements, expressions such as yeah or mmmh and laughs in some instances. The idea is to get the exact conversation word by word as said by the participants during the interviews (Bryman, 2012. p485).

3.7.2. Thematic Analysis

Data was analysed thematically, a process which requires pursuing emergent lines of thoughts and interpreting them (Bryman and Bell, 2016). According to Braun & Clark (2021), thematic now referred to as reflexive analysis identifies patterns or themes within qualitative data. Further Creswell (2013), affirms that analysis of data involves organizing the data, conducting

a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them. Thematic analysis can be deductive and inductive whereas, in deductive analysis, the themes are predefined from the literature, whereas in inductive, they emerge from the findings or data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I applied an inductive thematic analysis.

In identifying themes, Braun & Clark (2006), distinguish two approaches: semantic and latent, where the researcher respectively looks at the surface meaning of the data or delves deeper into identifying and examining the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations and ideologies that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of data. Therefore, the analysis uses both semantic approaches and goes further into the latent level to go deeper and understand these meanings.

After transcribing, I followed the six steps outlined by Braun and Clark (2006, p6) for the thematic analysis. The six steps are shown in the figure below. They give a clear and usable, easy to follow framework. Another advantage of thematic analysis is that it is a method rather than a methodology, (Braun & Clark, 2021). Braun and Clark emphasize that reflexive analysis is not an outcome of a strictly followed rules, but requires going forward and backwards reflecting and building on every stage of the process. Below are the six steps in the figure below.

Figure 2. shows the six steps to good thematic analysis by Braun & Clark (2006)

Phase	Example of procedure for each step
1. Familiarization	Transcribing Data: reading and re-reading, noting down initial codes
2. Generating initial Codes	Coding interesting features in the data in a systematic fashion across the data set, collating data relevant to each code
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each theme
4. Involved Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset. Generate a thematic map
5. Defining and naming Themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics for each theme, generation of clear names for each theme
6. Producing the Report	Final opportunity for analysis, relate back to the research question or literature, produce report

The first stage is to familiarise oneself with the data collected. This requires immersing oneself by listening to the interviews and re-reading the notes. The first thing I did at this stage was to transcribe the data through writing down notes that included, words spoken and expressions. Then I went back and listened to the recording comparing it again with the notes and filling in the omissions in order to get the correct words and sentences.

The second stage requires generating initial codes. This requires identifying and organizing data in a meaningful and systematic way. Codes are organised in such a manner that they address the research question. For example, the responses on the challenges CPOs encounter working with children in foster care are organized together. Since the research is using an inductive approach, I made sure a used line by line coding in order to go through all the data. This is also because the discussion and interaction especially in the FGD would move forward and backwards and not really taking a linear flow making information to spread across the whole interview. Attritionary, though having research question in the back of my mind, I did not have pre-set codes instead I developed and modified codes throughout the process.

The third stage is searching for themes. Braun & Clark (2006) refers to a theme as patterns of ideas that and interestingly similar and should be related to the research question. Themes come about after gathering codes that give or say something about an idea. For instance, in my data, codes such as do visits, a lot of talking and make telephone calls, education, health are seen to be related to the support given to children these can be collated to laws and guidelines. Suffice to say codes builds into organised broader themes that will specifically address a particular research question. Another thing I observed is that some codes would fit in more than one theme for example talking as a guideline and as strategy for collaboration.

The fourth stage involves reviewing themes. Once the themes are organised, there is need to check if they work in relation to codes extracted. This requires reviewing and modification to ensure the themes are coherent and that the codes are relevant to the themes.

The fifth stage is defining and naming themes. At this stage you have your themes and what is required is to refine them and the aim according to Braun & Clark (2006, p.92) is to identify the essence of what each theme is about. This stage is the final stage, and it involves naming the themes, what they mean and also establish if there are subthemes and how the overall themes relate to each other and their position in whole research process.

The sixth stage is producing the report, this is the final stage of analysis. This requires the researcher to relate back to the research question and literature and relate them to the themes and produce the final report.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethics may be defined as a rigorous procedure of reflection on human actions and choices to guide decisions that respect human dignity and do no harm to the participants (Ferreira and Serpa, 2018). This study therefore ensured the following ethical practices: ethical approval, getting participant consent, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality and data management.

3.8.1 NSD Approval

I first wrote to Norwegian social science data services (NSD), to seek approval. This is a data protection agency that ensures that all those conducting research adheres to protecting participants from Harm. The agency gives approval and clearance for research to go ahead. Approval for this study was granted on the 17th of March 2023 under the reference number 779476. See attached appendix number.

3.8.2 Informed Consent

According to Bryman, (2016), informed consent pertains to obtaining permission to partake in a study, upon clear comprehension and appreciation of associated facts, implications, and consequences. The project information document was sent through the gatekeeper beforehand and who distributed to potential participants. It contained all the information pertaining to the study, data to be obtained from them, how that information would be used. The Information stated that the interview was voluntary and withdraw at any time without any consequences. Permission was sought for recording. They were also informed that if one decides to withdraw, data will be destroyed only before the point of anonymisation; however, after anonymisation, data cannot be destroyed because, at this point, the data cannot be linked to the participant's identity.

3.8.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

Participants were clearly informed that the data collected will be kept with utmost confidentiality. To ensure the privacy, the participant's identities were anonymised using codes, such as Participants 1, 2 or A and B. To avoid causing harm to the participant, the researcher also advised participants to not discuss sensitive topics that may be traumatic to them.

3.8.4 Data management

I used the University of Stavanger emails for setting up interviews and a protected Microsoft team link for conducting the in-depth online interview. The data was managed and stored in a secure place (using only the UiS account) and was only accessible by me and my supervisor. The recording was used for analysis and will be destroyed after the thesis report has been assessed and published. This is to adhere to the EU General Data protection regulation (GDPR).

3.9 Research quality

Research quality is critical for rigour, integrity, ethics and accountability of the research process and its outcomes (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell and Poth, 2018; Flick, 2018). In light of the current debates, Miles et al. (2014) building on Lincoln & Guba (1985) distinguish between traditional approaches and alternative methods for naturalistic research and reconcile them as shown in.

Table 3: Aspect of research quality

Aspect	Definition
Objectivity/ Confirmability	The extent to which the research process and outcomes are free from the researcher's bias.
Reliability/Dependability/ Auditability	Refers to the extent to which the research process is consistent and reasonably stable over time across researchers and methods, such that another researcher can follow the same process and arrive at more or less the same outcomes.

Internal validity/credibility/authenticity	While there are several definitions of validity, the researcher takes a general or generic approach to the truth value and whether the findings make sense or are credible to the people we study and the researcher. In other words, do we arrive at an understanding of the phenomenon?
External validity/ Transferability/Fittingness	Refers to the generalisability or extent to which the study's findings can be applied to other contexts.

Table 3 show traditional approaches to research quality of objectivity, reliability and validity and juxtaposes them to Lincoln and Guba's (1985)'s viable alternatives, including confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability, and Miles et al. (2014)'s addition, application aspect. Accordingly, the researcher follows the viable alternative approach by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which aligns explicitly with qualitative or naturalistic research. First, the researcher ensured the confirmability of the research process and outcomes by explicitly and in detail describing all the methods and procedures. Also, the researcher relied on the supervisor checking to confirm that the analysis presents the actual value or picture of the phenomenon—or subject of interest. Furthermore, reflexivity (e.g., Maxwell, 2020) helped the researcher reflect on potential sources of bias, including their personal values, beliefs, opinions and experiences. Further, following the emphasis by Miles et al. (2014), the conclusions were explicitly linked with the exhibit of the condensed or displayed data illustrated in verbatim quotes of key texts and phrases.

Second, the dependability of the process was ensured through a thorough literature review to specify the analytical constructs and connect to the theory, the documentation of every step of the research cycle, and using tried and tested methods to select participants, collect and analyse the data. The data analysis followed one of the most commonly used methods of qualitative studies, the six-step thematic analysis by Braun & Clark (2006). The data collection did not only rely on one method but utilised a focus group and one in-depth interview using a similar semi-structured interview protocol for comparability, with the two approaches conducted in two different regions of Norway. Also, the researcher's role and status as an immigrant and experience as a social worker were explicitly described through reflexivity.

Third, credibility was ensured through several strategies. One was that a thorough literature review helped ensure the findings reflected the phenomenon of interest. In this case, the experience of a child protection officer providing foster care support to children with immigrant backgrounds. Furthermore, the two approaches of a focus group and an in-depth interview allow multiple lenses making one of them counterfactual to check the other, and their triangulation helps to produce converging conclusions. If not, the differences were well explained and included suggestions for future research.

Fourth, on transferability or generalisability, the study was qualitative and used a small sample of participants. While there is debate on the generalisability of qualitative findings (Bryman, 2016; Miles et al., 2014; Flick, 2018), a plausible argument by Creswell and Poth (2018) is that the findings give a thick description and can be generalisable as far as theory is concerned, what is termed analytical generalisation rather than statistical generalisation as in quantitative studies but can be generalised to that particular context. Lastly, as Miles et al. (2014) and Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasise the need for values and societal impact or applicability of research outcomes. The researcher explicitly stated their positionality, addressed issues of

ethics, the limitations of the research, and its theoretical contributions, and written in an accessible language, implications for practice and policy.

3.10 Limitations of the study

This chapter will focus on the limitations encountered through the study, emphasising the methodological limitations. The study was limited by the small sample size due to time and the nature of the study, thus making the findings generalisable only to theory (analytical generalisation) (Miles et al.,2014). Another limitation was that interviews create a “Hawthorne effect”, which according to Creswell, 2014 is a tendency for participants to share information they think the interviewer wants to hear or must hear. Due to the study’s nature, I sensed that the discussion (FDG) was sometimes guarded. Also, the purposeful sampling of the participant relied on the gatekeeper’s subjectivity, which can affect the study results (Cooper & Schindler,2011; Creswell,2014). Time to get the NSD approval and recruit the participant was a challenge which ended with only one FDG with four participants and one in-depth interview, whereas three focus groups are usually recommended. This could have affected the findings of the study.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter findings from this study which reflect participant’s experiences working with children in foster care. Their voices or words are highlighted and gathered into similar related ideas to forms sub themes which later constitute main themes as shown below in table 2, which emerged during analysis.

Table 3

Sub themes	Themes
CPOs offer support as stipulated in the law and guidelines. The support and services must be in the best interest of the child. CPOs must exercise their discretion.	We follow the law and guidelines
Cultural differences Child developments and needs are complex. Shortage of resources	Expectations as the basis of challenges

Matching
Empathy and discretion
Cultural competence
Collaboration

Striving to build
understanding

4.2 Support for the Children

Theme 1: We follow Laws and guidelines.

The theme laws and guidelines were generated from three sub-themes as illustrated in Table 2.

i) CPOs provide support and services as stipulated in the laws and guidelines for practice, ii) that the services must be in the best interest of the child, and iii) Child protection officers also exercise their discretion.

According to the participants, laws and guidelines are the basis for providing support and services. The Norwegian laws require that support services be provided to the child and the foster family. The support given fulfils the basic rights and protection of the child and the family where the child lives. Children should be supported with education, finances, and health care. Participant 3 echoed the following regarding the support for the child;

P .3 “Responded that children have rights to school, finances of what we cover, basic needs and dental care, meetings with schools, a vital part of the job to ensure the child receives what they are entitled to”.

During the discussion, all participants echoed the importance of the child to continue attending school even when they are in foster care, to have access to health services such as dental care and financial help to cover daily needs.

In addition, the laws and guidelines require the provision of counselling and supervision and control services to the child and the family. Participants talked about the importance of counselling services from the beginning of the foster process and throughout the period because it helps with communication and resolving differences that could arise between the foster child and the foster parent or between the parent and the case worker regarding the child. This was emphasized through the following statement.

P .1 “Forster parents will receive significant counselling in the first year they have the child. They receive a significant amount of counselling. Usually, the entire unit is usually involved, including social workers, case workers and or psychologists”.

These services are tailored for both children and foster parents to help them adjust in the process of living together or when there are matters that need to be addressed between the child and the parent, as affirmed by participant 3 in this statement;

We work with the child through the foster parent. We talk to the parents but don ’t like to talk to the child directly because it is not us who have to tell the child no or yes”. But we also have to balance. We often work together with them and try to balance between the child and the parents. We discuss and work together with the counsellors to find common ground.

Similarly, other participants also mentioned that laws and guidelines require regulating and supervising foster services. The CPOs stated that the role of supervision and control was conducted by an independent worker known as the child carer appointed by the county and acts as a go between them, the child and foster family. The child carer performs supervision and control responsibilities and monitors the child’s welfare in foster home, not only the child but

also to check if foster parents are coping well or have any concerns about the child's welfare. They also mentioned that this independent person is assigned this role to ensure transparency by keeping checks and balances. The child carer acts as a point of contact between the child and the caseworkers and is the one who is very much involved with checking on the child regularly, as highlighted in the following statements,

P 2 Yes, we visit a minimum of 4 times a year. We talk to the child if they want to. It is a requirement by law and counselling services.

P 2, "and have a lot of visits to the families to control and report to this office. a lot of contacts with the family, a go-in between the caseworkers and the family. Check that caseworkers are doing their job. It is a supervision and control position".

P3. The county appoints the person who visits and talks to the parents. This person is not affiliated with this office. They belong to the county but not in the same department as the caseworker. We don't usually have direct contact with these people. We do not appoint them because they need to control that we are doing our job.

Regarding the CPOs ensuring that the foster child is provided with the above services, the CPOs also offer these services in line with the "best interest of the child", a guideline that requires protecting children by providing services to meet their basic rights.

In agreement, participant 4 added that "the law tells us that they have to do this. It is decided by the Barnavern's law. It decides that this should be done".

The participant highlighted through the following statements how they ensure the 'best interest of the child' is upheld. For example, to ensure the child's transition from their biological family into foster care is smooth, they ensure the process is less disruptive as much as possible by having a familiar person to the child appointed as a child carer, as mentioned by P1 in the below statement;

Sometimes we can request for a special person who is connected to the child, sometimes a teacher or a friend's mother or whatever.

According to the participants, someone close to the family will be more relatable to the child as they may know them already. Another way the CPOs ensured the best interest of the child was when they were choosing foster parents for the child, one of the participants (P.3) stated that,

P..3 Geographical location should be considered. The foster parents should, if possible, be close to the child's biological family so that the child can maintain the same school and friends and maintain contact with their biological family.

The participants informed me that 'the best interest of the child' helps in the stability of the child, and sometimes we just have to make decisions that we feel will help the child. For example, participant 4 stated that,

For me, I would much rather choose a family that is perhaps a little unstable but older compared to a young couple. Because we have to find a family that we hope will remain a family for a long time.

Participant 5 also mentioned how she would go the extra mile to ensure they meet the needs of children. In one instance, she said the following,

P.5 For instance, being from a minority background, I also put myself in their shoes. I try to help them in their everyday activities. Umm, so I try to help the child implement their daily plans..

She also mentioned the need to balance between professional and personal engagement with the children as she felt that;

And when I, as a minority, as someone with a minority background, say something and try, I have to kind of like explain myself to them(fellow CPOs) in a way to kind of like why the child needs certain things or why this might not be the right thing for her.

Sometimes I just want to be a social worker and do the job. I don't necessarily have to be a culturally competent lecturer or something like that, yeah.

4.3. Challenges Encountered

Theme 2 Expectations as a basis of challenges

The theme expectations as a basis of challenges emerged from three subthemes, namely i) Cultural differences, ii) Complex child development and needs, and iii) Shortage of resources. Expectations were seen as emanating from both the foster child and the foster parent. Cultural differences were considered a main cross-cutting issue that led to challenges when working with children. According to the CPOs, from the point of following guidelines, they must also consider culture, especially for children with immigrant backgrounds. This means that challenges come with these differences. Participant 3 broadly stated that;

Obviously, especially at all levels of considering immigrant children, we do have some guidelines and a set of laws. But we have to consider people's culture, national background, religion, ethnicity..

Another thing that results in challenges regarding cultural differences is the expectations of the foster parent from a foster child. For example, participants narrated the following;

P1. I remember when I had an African child in a Nordic family, the foster mother asked the child where you are going, who was there, and what did you do, just trying to show interest in the child. The child felt controlled. She told me she had never talked to her biological mother like this before

P3 In Norway, we are used to talking about feelings and telling others about how we feel, and going to therapy. It is normal, but other cultures often do not have words for different feelings..... It is also challenging for us to help them because we don't know how they are feeling.

P.4. I would say maybe this is a stereotypical one, but most language issues and cultural backgrounds take a while to integrate into the new family.

P 3, Foster parents expected the foster child to be grateful for the things they received, but in some cases, children may expect a lot more than necessary from the parents, as seen from the quotes below,

This was also confirmed by participant (1), that these expectations sometimes borders on the background of the child as shown as follows;

P1. And also, there have been a lot of issues about things like material goods, they want this and this, they want a lot of things, maybe that is their way of feeling loved, but you can't give them too much to spoil them too much or make them think that they can have just anything.

Additionally, P4 brought out that these cultural differences go beyond a child to touch on issues of their roles or position in their biological families because children are seen and positioned differently in different cultures in terms of their responsibilities. The CPO went on to observe the following,

P.4. I would just like to add something here. It is also about expectations from the child's side. Let us remember we have different cultures here. Children in foster families are treated as children. In contrast, in their families, they are seen as adults, and often teenagers have obligations to their families who expect them to work and contribute. Sometimes families will tell them they have to take care of their siblings. I am going to the hospital. Keep in mind that in some families' children will be considered an adult. Parents want money from the child, and the child will ask the foster parent.

On the sub-theme of **child development and complex needs**, CPOs pointed out that as children grow or develop into teenagers, their needs become complex, which usually poses a challenge to foster parents. The CPOs narrated having observed the following among foster parents and children as they progressed in age,

P.4. Identity quite often when they become of age, and this can be problematic for some families to manage. Sometimes foster parents have a slightly different understanding of what their job requires. I think it has to do with when the child is experiencing rather difficulties and rebellion grounds during their teenage years. The foster parents go this is not what we were expecting, we wanted a little girl, and we got a huge angry boy.

Another participant agreed that the development of the process of the child kind of set the foster parents in a state of uncertainty. The participants shared having experienced the following,

P.3. They get quite a young child who may seem quite okay, and then teenagerhood comes out, and they are like, what is this? This is not what I signed up for. It is not what I expected. Honestly, it's quite devastating for both the parents and the child.

In some cases, CPOs reported that children were just being children, and it takes patience from the foster parent to understand that, for example, in this scenario,

P.1. sometimes children do not understand that if they continue to ask and ask for things and the family gives them, other items will not be provided. One child told me, "It took me a lot of time to understand that if I ask for a lot of things that I do not need but was given, it will get back to me because my family could not afford other things like a trip somewhere"

Participants made the following observation because parents would have their expectations about the child they care for; when this is not according to what and how they thought it would be, they have difficulties coping with the changes and complexity of needs that come with it. The participants agreed that sometimes parents would forget to realize some of the children had problems in their lives and their progress may be slower than they would expect or that of an average child, appreciating that would help the foster parents. They reported that parents need to be realistic and take a balanced view of the foster situation. The following statements support their observations and suggestions:

Part 1. Another challenge is that foster Parents want to help the child as much they can and as fast as they can, and maybe the child is a bit slower than the parents expect. They want so much, good grades, and do many activities, and the child is not there yet and taking much longer. They are kind of disappointed.

Part 3 Parents get impatient about the progress the child is making. We understand them, but we tell them to lower their expectations.

Another important *sub-theme* that led to expectation as a basis for challenges was the **shortage of resources**. In the discussion, participants from both FGDs and the in-depth interviews mentioned that some of the challenges they encounter are mostly because the number of children needing foster care continues to increase while the number of foster families is dropping, putting pressure on the resources. Another area, according to them, bordered on cultural competence when working with foster children. This came to light through the following quotations. The participant mentioned that,

P.5 The number of children is increasing, unfortunately, and percentage wise, it is true with minority backgrounds; they are the higher number who have been taken from their families and placed in foster care or child welfare.

This was attributed to according to (P.2),

P.2. Many children need foster care. We also have the responsibility of single minor refugee children(unaccompanied). If they are younger than 15 years, we try to find foster homes. But the number of foster homes had dropped from 60 to 30 homes now in the kommune.

One participant highlighted that the other reason contributing to a shortage of resources was the need to “Match” children with respective foster parents suitable for them. The participant mentioned that culture and religion were among the things they would want to match the child with the foster parent. He stated the following;

P. 4. Guidelines on wanting a perfect match are there and emphasized, but not always a reality. There is usually criticism if you have a religious family, and the foster parent is from a different religion from that child. But we don't always have an alternative like ABC. Foster family should have a similar religion, if possible, but not always the same.

In the discussion, it was clear that the shortage of foster homes has led to limited options to compare from and picking a match that suits the child. Participants appealed for support with more foster homes. Another area of shortage of resources was the lack of cultural competence from the workers.

P4. We have noticed that sometimes we might not be as available the foster parents want us to be, which may leave them frustrated and feeling left alone to make decisions, the participant mentioned having noticed the following;

Regarding understanding the cultural background of the minority children;

P.5. As I've mentioned, there are few workers with minority backgrounds and understanding. So again, it's like even though as a social worker you are expected to know these things or some of the things that when it comes to cultures and stuff, but the reality is that not everyone knows it, depending on where they're from.

4.4. Strategies Used

Theme 3: Striving to build understanding.

The theme *striving to build understanding* emerged from three subthemes, as shown in Table 3: i) matching, ii) empathy and discretion, and iii) collaboration. *Matching* was considered a key strategy by CPOS in providing support to children with immigrants in foster care. They highlighted that matching must consider several factors, including culture, type of family to place the child, the agreement of the birth parents, and geographic proximity. This was the most critical factor and decision they had to take at the beginning of placement as the start determined everything.

On *matching*, the CPOs consider cultural factors. They reported that they would consider whether the child can be placed within a family with the same cultural background, including ethnicity, religion, and language. One of the CPOs made the following comment:

P.3 We must consider people's culture, national background, religion, national background, ethnicity, all those things, and so on a personal level. You want to consider these things. Yeah, It's natural to do so because you would do so anyway with anyone you want to consider their personal life and background, especially when placing someone in foster care. But obviously, with Immigrant children, the culture and religion, especially at work, it's essential to consider.

The CPOs explained that culture influenced things like the type of food, religion, family practices and daily practices. They argued that matching foster children with the ideal conditions helps them to integrate and thrive to realise their full development and potential. While this is challenging, they emphasised that the matching should meet close to ideal conditions where possible. One of the CPOs (P2) commented:

Guidelines on wanting a perfect match are emphasised but not always a reality. There is usually criticism if you have a religious family and the foster parent is from a different religion from that child. But we don't always have an alternative like ABC. Foster family should have a similar religion, if possible, but not always the same.

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Similarly, the CPOs reported that the type of family to place the child matters. They reported that it was their duty to check on the quality and nature of families selected for foster care and if a particular family is suitable for the particular foster child. Three of the CPOs (P4 and P5) respectively commented:

P4. P4 The experience of the family, do they have other children who will be potential siblings? How long have they been a couple? Have they recently moved? Do they have family

friends? What network do they have? This will quickly give you a picture of who they are, which concerns the stability they can provide for the child. I would much rather choose a family that is perhaps a little unstable but a little older than a younger one because we have to find a family that we hope will remain a family for a long time. Sometimes things don't work out.

P5 Considerations will be made about their background as well. If they have any children, their children will also be interviewed to make sure that they are okay with having a foster sibling with them at home and follow up on the situation and see how they feel about it. Also, there are a lot of background checks on the family to make sure that they are suitable for this child and depend on the child. So if it is a child with a minority background, they will try to find a family with a similar background to the child so that the child can maintain their identity and feel like they belong and not left out.

Further, the CPOs also mentioned that geographic proximity matters in matching the services. They used the term 'geography' and 'close to biological parents' to emphasise the importance of an ideal foster home. They further explained that this is important to facilitate biological parental visits and enable them to remain in contact and communicate with them. Two of the CPOs (P2 and P3) gave the following comments:

P2. If we can, we try to find a foster family that lives near their biological parents so that the child does not lose contact with friends and school.

P3. Geographical placement. The child to go to the same school, and maintain contact with friends. .

Lastly, while these factors were important for matching, the CPOs emphasised that agreement with the child's birth parents matters more. There was consensus between the participants in the FGD (P1 to P4) and the independent, in-depth participant (P5). They indicated that agreement with birth parents also help them resolve difficult situation or decision if they do not find a perfect match but something close to ideal. The CPOs observed that while the foster child and foster parent may not share the same religion, there could be a common aspect that may make matching easier and possible. One of the CPOs (P2) stated the following:

It is good if a home is an X religion home. Even Y religion parents prefer an X religion home because they say they all believe in Z, then it is okay with parents' consent.

Overall, the CPOs reported and agreed that matching makes it easy for the foster child and family to live together. It also helps establish a relationship with the foster children's birth parents. Subsequently, both allow them to build a mutual relationship with all parties, making their follow-up support services easier and ultimately effective. While matching emerged as a key strategy, the CPOs emphasised that this works hand in hand with other strategies, including being empathetic and their discretion, building cultural competence.

The CPOs highlighted empathy and discretion as central to their work if it is to be effective. They emphasised that they must consider the child's psychological, social and physical needs, such as finding a foster family that lives near their biological parents so that, as expressed by CPO (P2 and P3), they maintain their 'school' and 'friends'.

In some cases, depending on their background, they can use it to identify with the foster child. If they have an immigrant status, they could easily identify with foster families and children with a similar background. One CPO (P5) reflected:

Because of my background, I am an African. Both my parents are African-born, and I was raised there. But again, it's like just seeing some things reflect on your childhood when you were growing up in a way. For instance, the chat with the girl I told you about came from South America. Like if I see her, I can see her needs and struggles because I see myself in hers as I can relate. So for me, I would say the challenge would have to be being able to balance.

It's like finding the balance because I would see and understand some issues that she is going through that my other colleagues might not see or understand, and even though I tried to explain to them like maybe they could try to understand, it would still be the same. Because they have a different understanding and experience things in other ways than perhaps they would see, I would see that. Still, again, I'm expected to be a professional social worker, so I get home, I reflect a lot.

Further, the CPOs reported that while the law and guidelines stipulate what must happen, their discretion, including cultural considerations and other decisions such as school, was critical to ensure that services and support meet the needs of the foster children. Most CPOs use phrases or keywords that explain their discretion when providing services to foster children, foster parents and even biological parents. They used several terms, including 'consideration' and 'consider' and finding a 'balance', and they 'try' to do something 'if' certain conditions exist or are not met. Also, their discretion included the need to examine and understand issues and underlying motives of the foster family, whether it is next of kin or not. The following statements from CPOs (P1 and P2) respectively illustrate the role of discretion in decision making concerning foster care:

We could fall back and find within the extended family member. But We have to make decisions if there is a problem for a child to live within the family. We must decide. Perhaps we see an opportunity for a child to live within the family. Still, you have to establish whether they are doing it for economic reasons or is it for a mere obligation or are they in for the money. It is crucial to establish the true motive. Is there a genuine reason and not just an obligation?

Following their statements, the CPO hinted that discretion happens across the life course of foster care, from whether to place the child or provide counselling services to their biological parents during their stay with foster families and at the time of exit. For instance, they have to weigh and decide whether they will 'place the child in foster care', 'determine the extent of danger', consider whether the child's expectations from the foster family are realistic, and the child's reintegration back into the family. The CPOs commented that they must consider the child's culture in matching the foster child with the foster family and making discretions.

Further, *cultural competence* was also reported to be a relevant strategy. However, the CPOs did not state where they get this competence to make cultural considerations. It seems to be taken for granted. The exception was CPO (P5), *who said that her background as an immigrant helps*. She further reported that she tries, by all means, to raise cultural awareness among her colleagues. She wished there were opportunities to dialogue and share information on how CPOs can be aware of and understand cultural issues.

Finally, *collaboration* was highlighted by CPOs as one of the strategies they use to make sure that their services and support are effective and match the needs of the foster child and those of the foster family. The CPOs identified three at least four relationships or actors in foster care, including the biological parents, foster children, foster parents, counsellors, special

persons including teachers or a friend and other professionals, including immigration and checking and verifying information and counsellors. The keywords or phrases they used were 'we work together' and 'always involve others'. The CPOs made the following comments:

P1. Sometimes we can request a special person who is connected to the child. But that was maybe more common before than it is now, sometimes a teacher or a friend's mother or whatever.

While this collaboration involves external parties, one of the CPOs indicated that internally, P3 "We discuss and consult each other at work."

The same was supported by CPO (P5), who indicated that she deliberately shares information at work about children with immigrant backgrounds to raise awareness about cultural differences to make her colleagues reflect on what they do.

Further, they have to work with foster children and build a child-parent relationship in a family set up where as much as they must recognise and find the child's voice, they must work through the parents. The CPO (P3) reported the following:

We often work together with them, trying to balance between the child and the parents. Work with the child through the foster parent. We talk to the parents but don't like to speak to the child directly because it is not us who have to tell the child no or yes. Have limits. What they feel, what they want, we don't like to explain or be a parent to the child.

However, while this is in place, one of the CPOs (P5) suggested a need for broader dialogue and exchanging and sharing of information within the broader CPS and society. She argued that this could affect anyone who worked with children. She made the following comment:

And yeah, I mean, I've already mentioned this before, but like just having this as a topic and being discussed in more prominent places and more often it's the way that could help all of the social workers, people working in schools and pretty much just working with human beings in general like having an extensive discussion and a dialogue around it would help us a lot. And it will help us learn from each other and understand each other to do better for the children. Umm

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The findings will be discussed in relation to the literature and the theoretical framework that underpins this study in this chapter. The chapter addresses the research question, which investigates the experiences of child protection officers working with immigrant children in foster care. The nature of the support given to children in foster care of immigrant background, the challenges that CPOs face when working with children of immigrant background, and finally the strategies they use to address these challenges are discussed in three sections aligned with the sub research questions raised in the study. The research questions will be discussed using themes.

5.2 What is the nature of the support child protection officers provide to children from

The findings revealed that support for foster children is based on laws and guidelines for child protection and service delivery. This is related to a study by Kriz and Skivenes (2015), which found that child protection services in Norway are focused on the needs of the child and the family, with widespread government support at the family level. The findings also stated that Section 1-1 of the Child Welfare Act of 2021 was critical in guiding their work in ensuring that children and young people living in conditions that may be detrimental to their health and development receive the necessary assistance, care, and protection at the appropriate time. In making child protection decisions, the best interests of the child were always considered, a strategy that is consistent with the child welfare act of 2021 and confirms Friberg and Bjornset's (2020) study findings of children's entitlement to school, medical services, and child financial support as part of their fundamental rights. Skivenes et al. (2015) argue that such services should be provided within the welfare system in order to avoid child harms, which is consistent with the findings because the COPs provided the services to immigrant children within state institutions.

Furthermore, in implementing the best interests of the child principle, CPOs emphasized the geographical location of a foster home when placing children in foster care. The foster home had to be close to the biological parents' home in order for the child to continue attending the same school and maintaining friendships. This is in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which states that all decisions involving children must be made in the child's best interests. This allowed the child to stay in touch with their biological parents and friends while avoiding loneliness.

CPOs also ensured that children in foster care had constant access to health care. Larsen et al., (2020) agree in their study on foster children's experiences with mental health services. Foster families frequently have extensive contact with specialized health and welfare services, according to the study, because the children in their care have complex needs, such as a high prevalence of mental disorders and medical and dental treatment needs. Because of the various and difficult experiences that led to their placement in foster care, children in foster care may have a variety of health concerns. To prevent long-term effects, children who have experienced ACEs require intervention at the appropriate time, according to the life course perspective and development theory. This is also recommended by WHO (2018), that if a person has experienced traumatic events in their early life, these experiences may later affect them in their lives if they are not addressed. As a result, Norway recognizes this and provides a wide range of specialized health services to foster children.

Financial assistance is one way the government helps foster parents. Foster parents received financial assistance from the supervising municipality. This financial assistance allowed them to meet the child's basic needs. This enabled foster parents to provide necessities for the foster child, such as holiday equipment for outdoor activities and protective clothing, among other things. According to empowerment theory, families are socially empowered when their access to community resources and decision making is improved (Guerriero et al., 2021). The Child Welfare Act of (2021) guarantees children in foster care access to financial resources. The CPOS interviewed served as a liaison between the foster family and the municipality for financial benefits based on the child's needs.

Other services offered by CPOs included assistance in maintaining positive relationships between foster parents and children. CPOs did mention that "especially in the first year, the foster parents and the child receive a significant amount of counselling usually from the entire unit in the department which includes social workers, case workers, and or psychologist" to prepare the child and parents on how to adjust to their new lives. According to the CPOs, this facilitates open communication and lays the groundwork for collaboration and the development of interventions to assist the child, foster parents, case workers, and child carers through counselling processes. During this process, empathy was essential. According to the findings, the following studies confirm the importance of empathy in foster care. Lynch et al. (2019) conducted a study on empathy in social work communication and discovered that social workers used empathy as a social work skill to establish communication with the families they worked with. Lindal (2021) conducted a similar study on foster children and child welfare workers in Sweden and discovered that building relationships with foster children and social workers is a foundation for understanding the type of support the children require. The above studies agree with the fact the communication is important in establishing relationships in the client, worker relationship.

CPOs allowed children's voices to be heard during the participation process by communicating and collaborating with the child and the foster parents. This is related to the empowerment

theory used in this study, which advocates for social workers to ensure that service users are treated as co-creators of knowledge and interventions that affect them (Guerriero et al., 2021). The empowerment theory emphasizes the need for CPOs to build service users' agency through participation, and this study found that CPOs attempted to ensure children's agency while adhering to the best interests of the child principle.

However, the findings of the discussion reveal that in some cases, the 'voice of the child' is fulfilled in collaboration with an adult decision-making, which appears to suggest that taken literally, 'the voice of the child' remains vague, and a paradox. They have a voice, but it is not fully utilized because adults continue to make decisions on their behalf, which is, of course, open to interpretation. This was confirmed in the findings when the CPOs stated that they spoke to the child but through the foster parent because they preferred to do so because parents were the ones who decided whether or not the child should be placed. This is contrary to Section 1-4 of the Child Welfare Act (2021), which states, "A child who is capable of forming their own opinions has the right to participate in all matters." They have the right to speak to the Child Welfare Service without the consent of their parents and without being informed about the conversation in advance. The question of whether the child's voice is truly heard remains unanswered because there was no clarification on whether age is taken into account. It is clear that due to the need to use personal discretion and best interest of the child, CPOs end up diminishing the voice of the child.

As policy implementers, social workers were occasionally required to make decisions at their own discretion when determining what was in the best interests of the child. Kriz and Skivenes (2014) expand on this in their study on the street-level policy goals of child welfare workers. The CPOs interviewed for this study stated that they use their own personal judgment in matters that they believe are in the best interests of the child. For example, the Child Welfare Act number 1 section 8 requires that, when selecting a foster parent, due consideration be given to the child's ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious background in all phases of the case. As a result, CPOs reported that they considered people's culture, religion, and/or ethnicity, especially when it was a child from an immigrant family. However, this was not always the case because most children preferred Norwegian families over someone from their cultural background. The goal was to learn Norwegian as quickly as possible, which was made much easier by living with a Norwegian family. They were able to learn the language quickly when they lived with a Norwegian family. In such cases, CPOs exercise their discretion and do what the child desires, which, of course, necessitates respecting the child's decision.

5.3 What challenges do child protection officers encounter in supporting children from immigrant background in foster care?

When children are placed in foster homes, they are under the care of the foster parent, which affects the work of CPOs and foster children. Because the parent is in charge, they may have a lot of say in the decisions made regarding the child's well-being. This was evident from some of the issues raised by CPOs when engaging with foster parents about the child stated below.

One CPO described a situation in which a child from a different cultural background expressed concern about the foster parent, who showed a lot of interest in her private life, which upset her. The foster parent was acting in the best interests of the child, but the child felt controlled and reported to the case worker that she never discussed her personal life with her biological mother. This relates to the book chapter on adaptation and conformity written by Guerreiro et al. in 2021, which reports that the study finds that immigrants must balance maintaining their

original cultural identity and assimilating into the dominant culture on two fronts that are of utmost importance. It may take them some time before they decide how to self-identify and begin adhering to the customs of that particular culture.

The implication is that because children from different cultures are not always open about expressing their feelings about something or a problem they are facing, it is difficult for CPOs to know exactly how to help them. According to the CPO, it is difficult for children from certain cultures to express their feelings, and it is also difficult for foster parents to help them when they cannot describe how they feel because they will not know. This presented a challenge for CPOs when it came to assisting children because they did not understand how the child was feeling. This is also consistent with acculturation theory, which states that strategies like integration can help a child learn another culture while retaining their cultural identity if the host culture provides an enabling environment (Berry, 2005). As a result, CPOs should be aware of the need to assist the child in learning and understanding the culture of the foster parents, as well as the need for the parents to understand the foster child's values and norms.

Expectations from the child and foster parents posed another difficulty. Children from different cultural backgrounds would frequently ask for more items from the foster parents because they believed they had more money to spend, according to the CPOs. Foster parents, on the other hand, expected the kids to be grateful for what they already had rather than continually requesting more things. The CPOs observed that some kids saw the foster parents' provision of these material items as a sign of their love. Since spoiling the kids was a way for them to feel loved, they would advise the foster parents to give the kids specific things without spoiling them. Due to ongoing negative experiences, children with immigrant backgrounds may have grown up without the benefits of a healthy childhood. They may have lacked certain material possessions as children, so when they are placed with foster families, they request items to satisfy their unmet needs. Receiving more material gifts is interpreted as an expression of love by them. Similarly, CPOs interpret the children's behavior as a need for love that must be met. The preceding statement is consistent with the ACE literature by Wood et al., (2020), which states that children who have experienced ACE thrive when they have access to material resources that they did not previously have. However, the study concludes that children require additional resources such as social networks such as peers and school networks in order to feel a part of the system.

Other difficulties arise as a result of the parents' expectations of the child in their care, which CPOs attribute to the difficulties that arise when the foster parents' expectations are not met. They are dissatisfied and sometimes abandon the child. In some cases, parents may be dissatisfied when their child does not make the expected progress in schoolwork, for example, or when this child exhibits anger issues.

Not only are there cultural challenges, but there are also challenges that arise as a result of complex child development. According to Woods et al. (2020), "by the time a child with an immigrant background is placed in foster care, they have most likely had a multitude of adverse childhood experiences." The traumatic experiences may affect the child's performance in school and cause anger issues. Maynard et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review of the existing evidence on the impact of trauma on educational outcomes. The study found that children who have been exposed to traumatic situations have lower levels of educational progression than their peers. As a result, when CPOs say they understand parents and tell them to lower their expectations, they should be accompanied by evidence-based advice so that parents understand the learning difficulties their child may be experiencing.

Finally, some of the difficulties in making certain critical decisions on foster care were attributed to a lack of resources. According to studies, one of the reasons for the high representation of immigrant children in foster care in Norway is due to cultural differences between immigrant families and Norwegian culture, particularly regarding family life. Because of their different culture, immigrants face social problems that indigenous people do not (Ylvisaker et al., 2015). According to Kriz and Skivenes (2010), when working with minority populations in Norway, child protection officers face challenges due to parenting styles, culture, language barriers, and a lack of system knowledge. In recent years, the number of migrants in Norway has steadily increased, resulting in an increase in the number of children in foster care. However, this has resulted in a scarcity of resources, such as foster homes.

With the number of foster homes decreasing from 60 to 30 last year, according to the Department of Child Protection, and a large number of children in need of foster care, many children end up in institutions while waiting for families willing to take them in. Due to the scarcity of foster homes, CPOs have few options when it comes to selecting a foster family. CPOs reported that previously, they had three options to consider when matching the child, but now they simply go with the available option. The implication is that children will be placed with the next available parent even if they have not matched, contributing to high levels of movement from one foster family to the next. These findings relate with the findings of the Ofsted report (2020), which revealed that there was a severe shortage of foster homes in the United Kingdom. The report also stated that a severe shortage of carers is one of the most difficult challenges in making successful matches. Similarly, Tonheim and Iversen (2019) found that one of the reasons for placement disruptions was a mismatch between the needs of the child and those of the foster parents in a study conducted in Norway. The study also suggested that good collaboration with CWS would reduce the risks. According to the findings of the preceding studies, good matching plays a critical role in lowering the risk of placement disruption and providing a chance for the child to have a secure future. According to Ofsted (2020), unmatched endings to foster care placements cause additional instability for children, as well as carers taking a break from, or leaving, fostering, resulting in even fewer available foster homes for children in need.

Another resource shortage identified was in the area of culturally competent personnel. It was discovered that some professionals had no idea how to start a conversation with children or simply understand the difficulties a child may be experiencing simply because they come from a different cultural background and may not see or understand certain things in the same way that another child would. Due to cultural differences, some professionals may not fully appreciate or be aware of certain needs of children. As a result, the CPO emphasized the importance of developing cultural competence among CPOs, stating that it would go a long way toward assisting children in addressing issues of identity. Rugksa and Ylvisaker (2021) confirm this in a study on Cultural Competence Discourse, which emphasizes how knowledge of minority ethnic groups' cultural values, norms, and traditions can provide a foundation for understanding and addressing social problems among immigrants.

5.4 What strategies do child protection officers use to address their challenges?

In the data analysis the following were the strategies used by the CPOs.

Building understanding between all the stakeholders involved in the process of foster care. Understanding between the child, the CPO, the foster parents, and biological parents. The discussion with the CPOs mentioned the following as strategies that they used in addressing

challenges they encountered. Matching, using empathy and discretion and as well as collaboration between the involved parties.

When matching, CPOs go to great lengths to consider the foster family's preferences. Cultural background, including ethnicity, religion, and language are all factors. Matching is arguably the most important stage of the fostering process because it can determine the success or failure of the child's placement with the family. Ofsted (2020) conducted qualitative research on Matching in foster care in the United Kingdom. According to the study, good matching is critical in ensuring that foster children have a secure base, feel loved, and can enjoy their lives. Because cultural differences have been identified as a source of conflict between foster families and children, it is critical that CPOs make every effort to match to avoid a breakdown of the relationship.

When assigning children to foster families, CPOs also considered other aspects, such as the family's history with foster care, whether it included other children, how close the family was to the biological parents, and how well they handled stressful situations. The CPOs reported that this will quickly give you a picture of who they are.

Another strategy used by CPOs to address challenges is empathy and discretion. As professionals, social workers must be sympathetic to the clients they serve. Empathy is one of the core values of social work, and the entire role contributes to the development and maintenance of relationships between social workers and families. CPOs used this value to try to understand some of the children who were seen as having difficulty adjusting to a new environment, for example. CPOs used their own experiences to try to understand and assist a child, for example, in navigating their feelings and identity. They would express this by assisting the child with their daily activities and providing information about what they needed to get and where they could get it. This approach is consistent with Lynch et al.'s (2019) research on the behavioral dimensions of empathy. The quantitative study discovered that social workers demonstrate empathy by communicating with open questions and reflections.

Reflecting on one's childhood, according to one CPO, helps you identify with the child and understand exactly what they are going through. In this vein, CPOs take their discretionary strategies a step further. For example, CPOs may decide to become more involved with a child who they believe requires more assistance than others due to their unique needs. This may cause professional difficulties because it may necessitate stepping outside of professional boundaries. This is consistent with Kriz and Skivenes' (2014) research on the street-level policy goals of child welfare workers. I read there that ambiguous or conflicting policy objectives could lead to a quandary, and employees could use their discretion as lower-level bureaucrats to resolve these quandaries.

Additionally, CPOs noted that occasionally, outside of the realm of required matching, kids themselves would choose to live with a family from a different cultural background in order to develop their language skills. This supports the findings of Berry's (2017) book chapter on theories and acculturation, which finds that adopting the integration strategy is associated with high levels of wellbeing. Children decide to live with Norwegian families because they believe it will help them learn the language, so to speak. On the other hand, this study shows that, despite worries from the committee on the rights of children (2018) that the process may cause children to lose contact with their native culture and language, kids may decide to learn other cultures on their own to help with their integration into the host nation (Berry, 2005).

Collaboration is yet another tactic employed by CPOs in their work. owing to the nature of foster care, which necessitates the involvement of numerous parties or actors in order to ensure

the child's wellbeing. The best interests of the child are served by the child's biological parents, foster parents, case workers, carers, and teachers from the child's school. CPOs claimed that in order to support the child, they work together with parents and amongst themselves. It was mentioned that both internal and external collaboration takes place. When a child is placed in foster care, the caseworker might ask the child protection agency to appoint a caretaker who is familiar with the family; this person could be a friend, teacher, or relative. When there is a conflict or dilemma that needs to be resolved, the CPOs work together, which aids them in finding a solution. If the child is to grow up in a good environment with the necessary support, cooperation between CPOs and foster families is also necessary. CPOs may consider a geographical location closer to the child's biological parents to ensure the child maintains their relationship with their family as well as their identity. According to Section 9-4 of the Child Welfare Act (2021), the CWS should always consider whether a member of the child's family or close network can be chosen as a foster home. According to Przeperski and Taylor's (2022) study on Cooperation in Child Welfare Decision Making in Poland, social workers' decisions are the result of collaborative work between professionals with different roles. This also confirms the importance of collaboration between stakeholders playing different roles during the foster care period.

6.0 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

6.2 Introduction

This chapter begins by restating the study's goal, main research question, and sub-research questions. It then summarizes the findings presented in Chapter 5, makes recommendations, emphasizes the study's limitations, suggests future research directions, and concludes with the researcher's reflections. As a result, the purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences of child welfare workers who work with foster children from immigrant families. It addressed the following primary and secondary research questions.

What are the experiences of child protection officers involved in the foster care of children from an immigrant background; while the sub research questions are

1. What is the nature of child protection officers' support for children from immigrant backgrounds in foster care?
2. What challenges do child protection officers encounter in supporting children from immigrant backgrounds in foster care?
3. What strategies do child protection officers use to address their challenges?

6.2 Summary of findings

The data revealed three main themes: i) we follow the law and guidelines, ii) expectations as the foundation of challenges, and iii) striving to build understanding. **The first goal was to understand the nature of support provided by child protection officers to foster children from immigrant families.** The findings, which are consistent with the literature, indicate that CPOs follow the law and guidelines while also exercising discretion to meet the basic rights of foster children, such as education, health, and others. They also offer counselling to biological parents, foster children, and foster parents, as well as acting as information brokers between these parties and other stakeholders, such as complementary service providers. The work of child protection officers is governed by the law and guidelines. While this is true, studies show that CPOs appear mute or muted in a top-down approach that ignores a bottom-up approach and their potential role as street-level bureaucrats to involve the law and guidelines.

Similarly, the second goal was to identify the challenges that child protection officers face when supporting children with immigrant backgrounds in foster care. The findings suggest that child protection officers face challenges in supporting children with immigrant backgrounds in foster care because of expectations. Cultural differences emerged as a significant factor, with children's development and needs as complex as they are, and a lack of resources as challenges for CPOs. These challenges are interconnected and present a wheel of expectations that complicate and create misunderstandings in the work of CPOs. However, the findings also revealed that, in contrast to the negative public perception of child welfare services, foster children appear to value the assistance they receive.

The third goal was to investigate the strategies used by child protection officers to support foster children with an immigrant background. To effectively provide support services to foster children from immigrant backgrounds, in accordance with the law and guidelines, and to overcome the challenges, the findings suggest that CPOs should strive to build understanding with all parties involved through at least three specific strategies, which include matching, empathy and discretion, and collaboration. While matching appears to be a key strategy for overcoming cultural challenges, some foster children prefer to be placed in native Norwegian homes rather than similar immigrant cultural backgrounds.

Overall, the findings indicate that, while child protection officers' work adheres to the law and guidelines, they strive to build understanding in order to overcome challenges of expectations that arise primarily as a result of cultural differences in supporting foster children from immigrant families. However, the findings also suggest that, even with these, the children's expectations are not always in line with those of the law and guidelines. Furthermore, this suggests some ambiguity in the concept of 'the child's voice' and 'the child's best interests,' and calls into question the extent to which the law, guidelines, and CPO discretion can all work together.

6.3 Recommendations

The thesis makes recommendations to practitioners, who are CPOs and policymakers, including government and professional associations, based on the findings presented above.

1. Recommendation to practitioners

- While the law and guidelines are important and specify the mandatory services, CPOs must also exercise discretion, empathy, and strive to be culturally competent.
- CPOs should strive to increase the child's voice in all decisions made in order to ensure their full participation.
- CPS is a collaborative organization. As a result, CPOs must continue to reach out to other stakeholders and collaborating partners.
- While a top-down approach is required, CPOs must also recognize that they play a bottom-up role in influencing policy and guidelines, and that their voice matters.

6.3.2 Recommendations to policymakers

- There is a need to broaden the process of developing laws and guidelines and to foster a collaborative environment in which not only the voices of foster children and foster parents are considered, but also the voices of CPOs, so that they are consumers and co-producers of these laws and guidelines.
- The lack of resources in foster care for children of immigrants remains a challenge. More resources are needed to increase incentives for the recruitment of more foster homes, training, and ongoing support.

- There is a need for interventions that address the challenges of immigrant families; these interventions can reduce the number of children entering foster care. Interventions that work with other partners, such as NAV, to provide regular introduction courses that include cultural practices that protect children in Norway.

6.3.2 Direction for future research

Follow-up studies could look at a larger sample size to make the findings more generalizable, as well as other contexts of CPO regimes. Furthermore, as the findings indicate, there is a need for additional research to consider extensive cross-sectional studies that allow the results to be generalisable to other contexts, as well as other CPS regimes other than Norway to examine the extent to which these or other findings may differ from one context to the next. While the study helped to bring the other side of the story or perspective of CPOs, CPS is a service that involves interaction and, to a large extent, co-creation; thus, future studies could consider looking at both service providers and users, as well as a policymaker, to see how the phenomenon of matching unfolds and gain further insights on what can be done to improve it.

6.4 My reflections

My interest in this study topic stems from my interest in children's institutional care. Coming from Zambia, a developing country, child protection services remain a pipe dream. It's upsetting to be confronted with the reality of children growing up in prison because their mothers are incarcerated. Coming to Norway and learning about the welfare system and the effective child protection system sparked a lot of ideas and a desire to learn more. Again, negative social media reports about how the system appears to be treating immigrant families unfairly in their child removal processes prompted me to seek a balanced narrative.

Borrowing from the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's story line, "the dangers of a single story", with these two insightful lines.

"By only exposing ourselves to a single story, we run the risk of constructing overly-simplistic understandings of other people and places", and "by only reading a single story, we cheat ourselves of experiencing different cultures from different perspectives"

I felt the need to get a balanced view since most of the reports and available literature captures the views of the service users and not much on the CPOs views especially working with immigrant children.

One of the most difficult challenges I faced was finding research participants. Given that my topic is one of the most discussed topics on social media, I quickly realized that finding participants willing to participate in this research would be difficult. After writing to eight municipalities, I received only two positive response. I tried talking to individual employees and asking them to participate, but I quickly realized that no one would participate without permission from the department head. This entire incident affected my research time as well as the number of research participants interviewed. Instead of the nine participants I had planned to interview in three FGDs of three each, I only interviewed five, four in one FGD and one in-depth interview.

I contacted my supervisor, who advised me that in the interest of time, I could proceed with the number that was available.

I feel that if I had started the research process earlier, I would have had an opportunity to change my methods and also enough time to convince participants. I would advise other students to start the process on time and consider choosing topics and study areas where it can be easier to

get participants. I believe the university should form partnerships and relationships with CPS agencies, such as hosting workshops of mutual interest and inviting CPS officials to meet and speak with students. They should be aware of the student's research activities. Field work attachments, which allow students to work as volunteers, are one way to advocate for this. Because child protection is a sensitive department, the school must introduce the students ahead of time in order to gain the trust of other workers. The school's sole responsibility is to ensure the safety of the students.

Finally, this was only my contribution, which I hope was insignificant. I hope that other students will take up this challenge and help to improve CPS services through research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Interview guide on experiences of child protection officers involved with children from migrant backgrounds living in foster care.

Background information of the participant

Name:

Gender:

Position:

Years working with foster children from immigrant background:

Theme 1. I am interested in hearing more about your experiences of being a child protection officer involved in foster care of immigrant children, can you tell me about this and the support you offer.

Theme 2. Can you tell me more about how you decide which foster family to place a child with and what factors do you consider?

Theme 3. Can you tell me more about some of the challenges you face as a child protection officer when working with immigrant children in foster care.

Theme 4. I am interested in how you manage to overcome these challenges, can you share with me some of the strategies you use.

Theme 5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your role in supporting and placing children from immigrant backgrounds into foster care?

Appendix 2: Project information

Project information sheet

NSD reference no.:779476

PROJECT TITLE: Experiences of child protection officers working with children in foster care in Stavanger, Norway.

Invitation to take part.

You are being invited to take part in a research project whose aim is to explore the experiences of child protection officers involved in the foster care placement of children from migrant backgrounds. The information below tells you more about the purpose of the study and what your participation will involve. Please before you decide, it is important for you to read through to understand. Kindly get in touch with me or my supervisor if you need any clarification on the information given. Take your time to decide whether you wish to take part.

Purpose of the project

When it is discovered that a child is at risk of harm or abuse, Norwegian legislation is mandated to effect care intervention measures (*omsorgstiltak*) by removing the child from their home and placing them into foster or institutional care when it is proved that parents cannot guarantee in-home care (Juhasz,2020). In 2019 Norway's population was 5.3 million and 940,000 which is 18% of the population were immigrants or children to immigrants (2019, Statistics Norway). According to the 2020 Norway statistics, among the children placed in care, children of immigrant parents are highly represented. This has been attributed to several factors, which makes the study worthwhile. The county social welfare board decides on the care order, while the child protection officers (CPOs) are responsible for care placement and support for the child. The CPOs conduct timely monitoring and the kind of support the foster child may require. Therefore, this study intends to establish the experiences of child protection officers working with children in foster care who are of immigrant background.

The main question: What are the experiences of child protection officers involved in the foster care placement of children with an immigrant background?

Specific questions

1. What is the nature of the service support do CPO provide to children in foster care.
2. What challenges do the CPOs face when working with the children and what strategies do they use to deal with these challenges.

The research project is part of my thesis under master's degree program in social work with families and children. As such the data collected will be used specifically for the fulfilment of the research project.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The University of Stavanger (UiS) is the institution responsible for the project.

Why have I been chosen?

The research study will be interviewing Child protection officers that work or have worked with foster children of migrant background. Since you are an officer working with these children who experience foster care . I believe you have the information that can be helpful to this study.

What does your participation involve?

First it is up to you to decide to participate or not. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign a participant agreement form. You will take part in a focus group discussion of 4 people or one on one in the event that you are unavailable for the focus group interview. The interview which can take approximately one hour will be conducted physically or online depending on what is convenient for you. The interview will consist of open-ended questions on the kind of support you give to immigrant children in foster care, the challenges you encounter working with them. You will also be asked to share the strategies you use to mitigate these challenges.

While taking notes of your responses, an electronic audio tape recorder will also be used so that no information is missed or left out.

Voluntary participation

You are informed that your participation is purely voluntary. Even if you have agreed to participate, you can withdraw at any stage of the interview without giving any reasons. Your withdraw will have no consequences on you Kindly note that prior to anonymisation of data, your data can be removed, however at the point of anonymisation we are unable to remove your data because at this point your name is not associated to your response.

Your personal privacy and data safety

Your identity will be anonymised and only codes such as letters or numbers will be used to ensure confidentiality. The recordings will only be used for analysis purposes. In accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). No other use will be made of them without your permission and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

To secure the safety of the data obtained

University of Stavanger (Uis) is the institution overseeing this study and the data controller of your personal information. Which means that we are responsible for securing your personal information and using it appropriately. Safe platforms such as the Uis email account and not personal account will be used for communication. Only the researcher will have access to the account and can only share the information with the supervisor. The Uis platform has backup platforms such as cloud which cannot be easily accessed by outsiders. Further no association of any sort will be made to the respondent such as organization were the participants work, their age, religious affiliation.

What will happen to your personal data after the research project?

As stated earlier, the data is meant only for the purpose of the research study. The audio recording will be destroyed immediately after transcribing. After the completion of the study program which is likely to be June 2023, all the stored data which include notes will be destroyed. The research report will not have any information that links the responses to those interviewed as it will be anonymised. It will also not be used for any purposes apart from fulfilling the master thesis.

Your rights

You have the right at any time to

- have access to data documented as your responses
- request to remove certain sections of your responses that you may feel uncomfortable to include.
- listen to the recording, correct, and clarify your answers
- request a copy the report
- to complain to the Norwegian data protection authority if you feel your data has been mishandled.

Processing of your personal data

If you decide to participate in the study, obtaining and processing of your data can only proceed with your signed consent and upon approval by both my Uis supervisor and data protection services who confirms that processing of your personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Contacts

For any further information and clarification, you can contact:

- Uis Vanessa Heaslip, Professor of Public Health, Uis, email: vanessa.heaslip@uis.no
- Student: Brenda Nyambe, by email: 264401@uis.no
Phone number +4741280539
- Our Data Protection Officer: UiS by email: personvernombud@uis.no
- Data Protection Services, by email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 53 21 15 00.

Yours sincerely,

Brenda Nyambe

Student Researcher

Vanessa Heaslip

Research supervisor

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project.

Appendix 3: Participant consent Form

Full title of the project: Experiences of child protection officers working with foster children from immigrant background.

Name, position and contact details of researcher: Brenda Nyambe, Uis, brendahnyambe@yahoo.com

To be completed prior to data collection activity

I have read and understood the information about the project on Child Protection Officers involved with children from migrant background living in foster care. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions. I therefore give consent:

- i) To participate in the focus group interview
- ii) To being recorded on a tape recorder.
- iii) To my personal data to be processed and used until the end of the project which is between June and July 2023.

Name of the participant.....Date.....Sign.....

Name of the researcher.....Date.....Sign.....

Appendix 4 Non-Plagiarism Declaration

I hereby declare that the Dissertation titled “Experiences of child protection officers working with children of immigrant background in foster care submitted to the Erasmus Mundus Master’s Program in Social Work with Families and Children:

- Has not been submitted to any other Institute/University/College
- Contains proper references and citations for other scholarly work
- Contains proper citation and references from my own prior scholarly work
- Has listed all citations in a list of references.

I am aware that violation of this code of conduct is regarded as an attempt to plagiarize and will result in a failing grade (F) in the program.

Date: 06.06.2023S

Signature: Brenda nyambe

Name: BRENDA NAYMBE

APENDIX 5



[Notification form](#) / [Experiences of child protection officers working with foster childr...](#) / Assessment

Assessment of processing of personal data

Reference number	Assessment type	Date
779476	Standard	17.03.2023

Project **title** **Data controller (institution responsible for the project)** Project **leader** **Student** Project **period** **Legal basis** **Comment**
Experiences of child protection officers working with foster children from migrant background

University of Stavanger / University Library

Vanessa Heaslip

Brenda Nyambe

13.01.2023 - 06.06.2023

Categories of personal data

General

Consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 6 no. 1 a)

The processing of personal data is lawful, so long as it is carried out as stated in the notification form. The legal basis is valid until 30.06.2023.

[Notification Form](#)

ABOUT OUR ASSESSMENT

Data Protection Services has an agreement with the institution where you are a student or a researcher. As part of this agreement, we provide guidance so that the processing of personal data in your project is lawful and complies with data protection legislation.

DUTY OF CONFIDENTIALITY

The data subjects are bound by their duty of confidentiality and cannot share confidential data with the research project. We advise that you remind them of their duty of confidentiality. Please note that it is not sufficient to avoid using names of students, patients etc. Be careful when using examples and background data such as age, sex and pinpointing exact time or place.

SHARE THE PROJECT WITH THE PROJECT LEADER

Please share the Notification Form with the project leader. Hit the "share"-button from the project's main menu. If the project leader does not accept the invitation within one week, you will have to send another invitation.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES

We have assessed that you have legal basis to process the personal data, but remember that you must store, send and secure the collected data in accordance with your institution's guidelines. This means that you must use data processors (and the like) that your institution has an agreement with (i.e. cloud storage, online survey, and video conferencing providers).

Our assessment presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

NOTIFY CHANGES

If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project, it may be necessary to notify us. This is done by updating the information registered in the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes: <https://sikt.no/en/notify-changes-notification-form>

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

We will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!