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JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY
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Re-visioning child protection management embedded in family empowerment

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Acknowledgements

Declaration by the author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including proof reading and technical advice regarding formatting, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. I have read and complied with the Guidelines of James Cook University for the Editing of Research Theses. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution.

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Abstract

The study explores the key question whether child protection practice management requires a re-visioning embedded in family empowerment. The principle objectives of the research were to promote our understanding of the views and experiences of families with the public child protection system by using empowerment framework as a lens for deeper exploration and mapping of the key themes of findings in articulating way forwards informed by the families. The concept has been examined within a qualitative framework through in-depth interviewing of a cohort of families about their individual experiences and expectations of the public child protection services. The project has progressed in two phases: Phase 1 was conducted through in-depth interviewing of the families. A critical social theoretical framework was developed to analyse the primary data. Phase 2 focused on a meta-synthesis of diverse empowerment approaches from a range of disciplines and developed a theoretical model/lens (Integrated Construct of Empowerment Theories-ICET). This theoretical model/lens is later utilised to map and interpret the key themes emerged from the primary data and then reported on the outcomes. The research identified a number of concerns around frontline practice management, issues around consistency and coordination in leaderships in the system and resultant struggles and alienation of families from the services. The findings highlight the experiential stress and disempowerment of the families at all levels of child protection interventions, which were complicated by the images of the frontline workers as powerful and able to support and make decisions. However, in reality they were not always able, and at times over reactive, invalidating, coercive and inconsistent in communication amidst further struggles due to frequent changes in the work force. The families' difficulties to engage with the service were compounded due to lack of trust on the system and associated uncertainty about what's going on or going to happen in the significant areas like out of home care, assessment, interventions and legal processes. These findings are also reinforced by the research in the last 10 years in the Anglophone countries, which recommended for a relationally based practice approach and the process should be directed by experiences of the families. Building on previous work, the theoretical mapping process has indicated an association between the processes of empowerment of the families and the development of the child protection system. The outcome also outlines an integrated stage process, in individual (professional), group, and systemic domains, as a potential scope for rebuilding child protection services as a pathway for improved service outcomes and empowerment of families. The study suggests a need for further research to develop a broader understanding of the experiences of the families in building the discussion for family empowerment focused service as a vision for child protection management.

Publications during candidature

Published (Book Chapter)	Khan, A. and Miles, D. (2011). *Talk to Me, Not my Illness*: Relevance of Human Rights and Social Justice in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Intervention. In Jones, P.; Miles, D.; Francis, A and Rajeev, S.P., (Ed.), *Eco-social Justice: Issues, Challenges and Ways Forwards*. Book For Change, Bangalore.
Published (Book Review)	Khan, A. (2012). Child protection practice. *Children Australia*, 37(2), 82-83. doi: http://dx.doi.org.elibrary.jcu.edu.au/10.1017/cha.2012.19.[Reviewed of the book, Child Protection Practice by Harry Ferguson. Palgrave McMillan, U.K]
Published (Book Chapter)	Khan, A. (2014). Engaging children with mental health issues: review of approaches to practice. In: Francis, Abraham P., (ed.) *Social Work in Mental Health: areas of practice, challenges and way forward*. SAGE Publications, New Delhi, India, pp. 9-34.
Published	Khan, A. (2015). Child Protection: Need for family focused approach. *Social Work Journal*, 3(2). Assam University, Silchar. India
Published	Khan, A. and Francis, A. (2015). Strength Based Practice with Children with a Mental Health Condition. *International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice*. 3 (1), 9-19. Horizon Research Publishing Corporation, USA

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List of Abbreviations

AASW: Australian Association of Social Workers

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics

AIHW: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

CMC: Crime and Misconduct Commission

CPS: Child Protective Services

CSO: Child safety Officer

CSS: Child Safety Services

DHSS: Department of Health and Social Services

DOH: Department of Health

DoCS: Department of Child Safety

DSQ: Disability Services Queensland

F&CS: Family and Children's Services

FGC: Family Group Conference

GII: Gender Inequality Index

GSCC: General Social Care Council

HDI: Human Development Index

HDR: Human Development Report

HLSCB: Hillingdon Local Safeguarding Children Board

HMSO: Her Majesty's Stationery Office

ICET: Integrated Construct of Empowerment Theories

ISW: International Social Work

JCU: James Cook University

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NSPCC: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

NYSPCC: New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

OHCHR: Office of the High Commission for Human Rights

PEP: People Empowered People

QLD: Queensland

SDM: Structured Decision Making

UK: United Kingdom

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

US: United States

USA: United States of America

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter outlines the conception and development of the research abstract whether the public child protection system needs a long term vision embedded in family empowerment. Having established where the idea came from and acknowledging my own connection and focus with the concepts, this chapter examines changes in the family system and in international child protection policy. This discussion highlights in particular the differing foci of child protection as either a forensic, risk averse system or a system where families are supported to protect and nurture their children. The implications of these two extremes in the Australian context are discussed. It outlines empowerment as a concept in a child protection context. The chapter also touches upon the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Conception of the research idea

Eleven years ago, while working for a non-governmental child protection organisation in the UK, I was required to work closely with the local statutory child protection authority in undertaking comprehensive parenting assessments, referred either through child protection case conferences or the Family Services Court. On a number of occasions during this period, I noticed multiple presentations of the same families to the public child protection services over a period of time. I was at times asked to engage these families in the assessment process as they confronted the possibility of losing multiple children to the care system. It was noted through the assessment process that after losing their children to the care system, humiliated and traumatised parents grieved their previous losses in silence, and often became parents again as they did not see any hope of getting their children back from state care. However, these parents, in the absence of appropriate support, struggled again in their parenting role and eventually became re-involved with the child protection services. It appeared to me that it became a cycle, contributing to trans-generational trauma and vulnerability in our society.

In trying to make sense of the complex predicament of the families, I started talking about my concerns with the team colleagues in an effort to advocate for the inclusion of parents' support needs and wellbeing in the "capacity to protect" assessment. To my surprise my colleagues rarely shared my views about parents and their needs, and I was often isolated within this team. However, I quickly realised that this was not about the individual colleagues or my particular team but the system, which was only interested in a narrow and   isolated

understanding of children's safety rather than connecting the safety process with the wellbeing of the parents and families, and therefore the children. The following picture appeared very relevant to explain my thoughts about the significant connection and dependency of the wellbeing of children with the wellbeing of parents.

Figure 1: A parent risks her life in flood water to bring her child to safety.

The above picture as retrieved from the public domain of a social networking site (Iqbal, 2015) seems to explain my perception that if we want to protect a child we must protect the wellbeing of the parents. However, it seemed the public child protection system, through its narrow lens is only able to see the child in the basket and does not see the parent underneath holding the protective basket container very tight in her desperate effort to bring her child to safety, taking the significant risk to her own life. What made sense to me from this symbolic picture was that the long-term safety and wellbeing of the child is embedded in the empowerment of the parent through appropriate practical support.

My keen interest and motivation to explore these issues was further reinforced when in a particular situation, I wanted to go the "extra mile" to support a young parent. I was not allowed to provide this support due to "priority and boundary" issues in the service. This experience left me with a profound sense of emptiness as a professional and as a human being. I felt my differing approach may have a connection with my differing socio-cultural background, which has allowed me to look at social phenomenon with a different and sometimes new perspective.

As an Indian social worker in India, I was committed to obtaining optimum levels of connection between the resources of the country and the wellbeing and empowerment of the people. In contrast, my work in the UK alerted me to a different perspective. Here in an   economically

developed country with a high rated Human Development Index (UNDP, 2013) and amidst several resources (individualistic legislations, structured child protection policy and health and social care system etc.), I observed the suffering state of the vulnerable families unable to connect with the prosperity of the nation.

I lived with these conflicting thoughts and attempted to nurture it through reading, writing and discussion with professional and academic colleagues. In further exploration, I also noticed that the vulnerability of the families lay in their own difficult developmental experiences and in some cases, the trans-generational pattern of their involvement with the child protection services. In trying to make sense of what the system is trying to achieve, I noticed an apparent incongruence between the family's expectations of the system and the child protection system's impression of the families. For example, I believed the families expected fair treatment, genuine consultation and inclusion in professional decision making processes, openness in communication, practical support and clear guidance. On the other hand, the system saw and described their behaviour in demonising terms, and responded as if the families who are struggling to care for children cannot change. In spite of their negative reputations, I found most parents were engaging reasonably in the assessment process, showing some openness to acknowledging their own parenting concerns and were seeking help. For example, one man referred for assessment was accompanied by a written alert "very aggressive person, recommend two workers are involved". However, during the assessment process, he was found to be very cooperative and his core issue was noted to be his feelings of being alienated from the system which generated a sense of anxiety and frustration.

In another situation, a mother in her early 30's, felt so positively connected through the parenting assessment process that for the first time she acknowledged the necessity of seeking help in relation to her previously unacknowledged childhood trauma. The assessment did not recommend the return of her children from the care system, but the empowering experience inherent in the assessment process (i.e. being heard, treated with respect and dignity, empathy, and honest reflection) helped her to make a difficult decision to consent to her new born being adopted when she became pregnant in the middle of the assessment. Meanwhile, four years later she applied for custody of her two children in foster care and successfully had one returned to her care.

While I was trying to increase my understanding of the experiences of these most vulnerable of families, other issues which highlighted unjust professional practice, miscarriages of justice, and, trauma and loss for families were being publicly exposed. Turnell, Elliot, & Hogg (2007), in their investigation of adoption cases in the UK statutory social services, observed flawed practice in the family circumstances assessments. In a specific case example, Turnell et al. (2007) found that a couple, following the removal of their first four children due to child

protection concerns, lost their fifth, sixth and seventh child at birth or shortly thereafter, without undergoing any updated parenting assessment. The authors further observed that the couple were able to retain the care of their eighth child when they were appropriately assessed and supported by social services.

de Boer and Coady (2003) in their study of Canadian Family & Children's Services (F&CS) noted the intrusiveness of the statutory child protection practice and the negative impact on the families which resulted in such elevated stress and fear in the home that the likelihood of the abuse and neglect of the children increased. They quoted the experience of a mother:

> I hated them [F&CS]. I wanted to blow up their whole office. I really did. I think it was mainly because of that stupid first worker [the intake worker]. I couldn't believe how F&CS would push somebody to the point that they were incapable of looking after their own child because the F&CS was making me mental….Worrying about having to lose your child every day is not putting you in a stable mind. It was so stressful . . . (de Boer and Coady, 2003, p. 42).

My own experience and the investigations I read about painted a picture of families entering the child protection system often under intense pressure to demonstrate their credibility as parents. They were required to manage practical needs (income, housing, respite/child care, general health and social care), to recover from their own developmental trauma if any, and to rebuild confidence and social reputation in the community. The fact that so many parents consistently struggle to do these many and complex tasks in my opinion reflected their aspirations for change and their desire for respectful treatment. I saw that they required clear directions about parenting gaps, assistance to access resources, support at the right time and the opportunity to have their voice reflected in all stages of assessments and intervention. The parents hoped that their children in the care system have a safe and nurturing environment with supports, while keeping the hope alive for their children's safe return home**.** I came to see the practice approach used by some statutory authorities was undermining the potential of the parents, leading to alienating behaviour from families and consequential negative professional attitudes in response – it became a cycle.

1.2 Research rationale and aims

The constant witnessing of the vulnerable state of the families in my professional capacity evoked several questions in my mind. I decided to use the opportunity for higher research degree study to pursue these questions and make a contribution to this area. My purpose in undertaking this research was to examine child protection processes from the experience and view point of families – those stakeholders most often made vulnerable by the intervention. I am committed to empowerment as a framework which can make a difference in lives of parents and have used this philosophical position as both a guide to my own practice as a researcher and in determining the desired outcomes of this research. In particular, I wanted to explore the potential of family empowerment as an underlining theoretical framework for practice in child protection. Therefore, the aims of this research project are to:

1. Explore the experiences of parents who have been involved with public child protection services.
2. Analyse the potential of 'family empowerment' as a framework to understand the experience of parents.
3. Explore the possibilities for improving the child protection services based on the views and aspirations of the parents.

The remainder of this chapter will outline the rationale for the research and the international and national context in which this research was conducted as well as discusses the key concepts relevant to the research project. The scope of the research is also discussed.

1.3 Child protection policy and practice

Protecting children from harm, mistreatment and even death has become an issue of worldwide significance with most western democracies struggling to establish policy and practice approaches that result in significant change (Ferguson, 2004). This section will examine the way in which child protection policy has changed and transformed, particularly in terms of the incorporation of family empowerment principles, in the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia before going on to examine the situation in Australia more specifically.

Parton (2010) noticed a significant shift[1] in the child protection operational system between early 1990's and 2008 in the UK. After the tragic death of baby Peter in England in 2008 and the significant public criticism of the role of the child protection services, the policy and practice approaches moved in a new direction. In this new scenario, child protection services

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[1] Change in process and directions

underwent the transition from forensically oriented practice to include renewed interest and priority in child protection management amidst increased understanding about broader risk factors as well as the protective factors and the ways to build resilience. The government started developing a broader perspective in understanding the reasons for maltreatment of children and the role of public child protection professionals and other relevant agencies in preventing this issue (Parton, 2010). The rationale for the policy shift may not be simply the impact of Baby Peter tragedy and the outcome of the relevant inquiry commission. Parton (2010) noted the impact through a major social policy commitment in the political establishment to reshape the child protection system followed by establishment of an independent review commission chaired by Professor in Social Work, Eileen Munro in 2010. The Munro commission (2010; 2011) argued for an empowerment focus approach, moving from bureaucratic and compliance approach to a learning culture and broader vision focusing on whether children and families are effectively helped and protected. The outcome of changing approaches to risk management, which is empirically based due to evidence of reliability (rather than risk driven clinically oriented) and long-term safety and care were effectively integrated into the empowerment of the child and the family welfare (Lonne, Parton, Thompson and Harris, 2009; Ghaffar, Manby and Race, 2012; Harris, 2012; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008).

However, gradually a slight transition is noted in the philosophical approach in the UK in the current situation. In 2015, the national child protection policy document, "Working Together to Safeguard Children" (Her Majesty Stationery Office [HMSO], 2015, p.8) was primarily based on two principles; that safeguarding of children is everyone's responsibility and a child centred approach in practice. Limited emphasis on family empowerment in the key principles was noted in literature, which appears some form of regress from the earlier empowerment focused approaches to practice. This seems to encourage isolated and risk driven practice perspectives on the frontline and is likely to alienate the families from the service (Khan, 2015). The child centred practice approach is considered a challenge in building empowerment based relationally oriented practice with families (Bunting, Web and Shannon, 2015; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014). The Laming inquiry commission had earlier remained critical of such policy and asked for more family focused initiatives (Laming, 2009). However, in January, 2016, the UK Prime Minister David Cameron's office initiated a direct support programme for the families by rolling out a parenting class voucher programme for parents to improve their parenting skills (Ross, 2016). This can be seen from various angles, responding to the public criticism regarding the regression in the policy and reinforcing the earlier broader vision, a statutory recognition of reaching out to needy families in a preventative perspective and also an attempt to "fill the gap" in the earlier policy document of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Parton, 2010; HMSO, 2015).

The debate for building family empowerment focused child protection policy has also taken place in Canada, a different geographical context. The Canadian child protection policy and practice has also seen stages of transformation from intrusive investigatory or forensic assessment models to a differential response model and now an inclusive and participatory model (Cameron and Freymond, 2014). The Canadian child protection system has gradually limited the reliance on investigatory or forensic investigations which could restrict opportunities for building productive and helpful relationships with the families experiencing diverse challenges (Cameron and Freymond, 2014). In recognising of the demands, unique circumstances and needs of the families, a differential response policy carries its own strength. This is a form of approach that allows the child protection services more than one method of response (Dumbrill, 2006; Schene, 2005). The differential response approach is a flexible process, which also recognises the variation in the nature of reports and notification and the "concomitant value of responding differentially" building on both strength and difficulties (Schene, 2005 p. 4). However, the differential approach was subjected to critical valuational scrutiny due to the difficulty in constructing a credible basis for dividing the child protection process into investigatory and assessment contexts (Cameron and Freymond, 2014). The response process was based upon information from limited or no contact with the families when decisions are made on partial information from the public reporter an issue also noted in the UK jurisdiction (Forrester, Kershaw, Moss and Hughes, 2008). Despite some difficulties in the differential approach, there was no evidence that children considered to be at risk of maltreatment are best protected by emphasising forensic and investigatory approaches alone (Cameron and Freymond, 2014). In response to the increasing criticism of the forensic assessment policy, the focus shifted to a family empowerment approach using an assessment process with a long-term focus (Harris, 2012). The Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services has rolled out a long-term strategy that articulates strength focused core principles: "Responsive, Inclusive, Collaborative, Outcomes-driven and Accountable" (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2013 p. 14). This policy response can be considered as a recognition of some of the criticisms on the differential response approach, which also articulates a transparent and responsive practice embedded in family empowerment (Dumbrill, 2010; Harris; 2012 and Wiffin, 2010). However, while the change in the policy directions is acknowledged, the earlier policy has subjected to criticism considering its negative impact in the families. Dumbrill (2010) criticised the earlier forensic policy citing the risks of disempowering and alienating the vulnerable families and called for a political solution to address the rising disproportionate power of the workers and to effect changes to the broader social system.

In the United States, the public child protection system relies substantially on family centred philosophical values that the family is the best place for the long-term growth and development

and the most effective way to ensure safety, permanency and wellbeing of the children (Myers, 2008; Reich, 2005). The values also require the service providers to engage, involve, strengthen, and support the families (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). The services also rely on preventative services like respite care, parenting education, housing assistance, parental addiction treatment, day-care, home visits, individual and family counselling, and home maker help (Waldfogel, 2009).

The statistical demographics of recurrence representations in the US suggest that some vulnerable families, especially those battling with other difficulties like mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence problems etc., are particularly at higher risk than others. An analysis of data from the US Department of Health and Human Services (2006), noted that from an annual intake referral of 6 million children, 25.2 percent substantiated, 3.0 percent indicated, and 0.4 percent alternative response victim. Accordingly, 320000 children went into out of home care and 1.3 million children were returned home with appropriate family support and no further action was taken on the rest of the referrals (Waldfogel, 2009). This data seems to bear the example of positive impact of the family centred based approach.

Formal child protection policy in the U S has been in existence since 1875 when the world's first civic body devoted entirely to child protection came into existence—the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [NYSPCC] (Myers, 2008). Gradually, from then on, intervention was carried forward by different voluntary social initiatives such as the Charity Organisation Society and The Hull House movement (Lee, 1996). Building the discussion on geographical context, the examination of the history of formal child protection initiatives in the US indicates the traditional values placed on prevention in the process of intervening in families (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). In contrast, the British and Canadian public child protection management services have started a paradigm shift from short term child harm reduction approaches to long term broader child and family wellbeing approaches (Parton, 2010; Dumbrill, 2006; Dumbrill and Lo, 2009; Waldfogel, 2009). However, the American public child protection system, whether under voluntary or statutory initiatives, seems to have always maintained a preventative and family centred based approach embedded in empowerment (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2016; Reich, 2005).

1.4 Child Protection in Australia

In Australia, public child protection is generally the responsibility of the state or territory based child protection departments that provide support to vulnerable children who are confirmed or suspected of being abused, neglected or harmed, or whose parents and carers are unable to provide adequate care or protection (AIHW, 2013). Lonne, Brown, Wagner and Gillespie (2014) have compared the Australian child protection system with the North American countries, claiming that a forensic, assessment-driven child protection approach is taken. In Australia, the child protection system primarily operates under the notions of risk, with public services investigating and assessing reported or suspected maltreatment. The services are subsequently accessed following the substantiation of maltreatment, or alternatively, referral to other services may occur where need is identified but risk of harm is assessed as not requiring ongoing statutory involvement. Despite the diversity of child protection legislations in tune with the local demands, there is a sense of uniformity in terms of principles, structures and processes (Lonne et al., 2014; Bromfield and Holzer, 2008).

All state and territory child protection policies are influenced by the Australian Federal Government's child protection policy document; *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; AIHW, 2013). The National Framework, while recognising that the safety and wellbeing of children is the responsibility of the statutory authorities of the country, has articulated a shared agenda for change, with national leadership and a common goal. The significant agenda that is set in the framework is the country's pledge to move from seeing 'protecting children' merely as a response to abuse and neglect to one of promoting the safety and wellbeing of children. This also asserts developing a public health model to provide universal support (e.g. health, education) to all families and more intensive support to those families needing additional support as a part of early intervention (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009 p. 7). The National Framework also acknowledged a grim scenario, that the rate of child protection reporting has doubled over the past 10 years and the children from the Indigenous[2] communities have remained significantly over-represented (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009 p. 6). Across states and territories, systemic failures in child protection approaches have been reflected in net-widening and increasing service demands (Lonne, et al., 2014).

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[2] In Australia, the term 'Indigenous' refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is used in this thesis to refer to both groups

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Recent statistics demonstrate that the number of Australian children entering the statutory care system has doubled; from 4.6 per 1,000 children on care and protection orders in June 2003 to 8.0 per 1,000 in 2012 (AIHW, 2013). The AIHW (2013) report suggests that since 2002–2003, more children have been admitted to care than have been discharged (though the difference in these rates is decreasing), with 2.4 per 1,000 admitted and 1.8 per 1,000 discharged in 2011–2012. Indigenous children remain profoundly overrepresented at all levels in each state and territory being almost 8 times more likely than non-indigenous children to be the subject of a child protection substantiation (Lonne et al., 2014; AIHW, 2013). The most recent report of AIHW, (2015) suggests a 6% rise over the past 12 months, from 135,193 children in 2012–13, and what is statistically significant is that around three-quarters (73%) of these children were repeat clients in 2013–14; which means, they were subjected to investigation, a care and protection order and/or an out-of-home care placement in a previous year. The repeat presentation needs to be understood in the light of current management approaches. The statistics related to repeat presentation is particularly relevant, as these statistics refer to families who have been subjected to intervention and yet further reports and issues arise. Further, Lonne and colleagues also noted that since 1997, Australia has had 42 major inquiries into child protection system failures, tragedies, and scandals with inquiry-led reform to improve the system (Lonne et al., 2014 p. 2). However, in spite of the statutory initiatives to improve the system, there is no credible change noted on the ground (Ainsworth and Hansen, 2006; State of Queensland, 2013; Lonne et al., 2014). This research provides an opportunity to explore this further.

The National Child Protection Framework (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) acknowledged the alarming increase of child abuse and neglect across the states and territories as a national concern (AIHW, 2015). The government also acknowledged that the statutory child protection systems were struggling under the increasing pressure of managing these workloads. The vision embodied in the National Framework is based on the proposition that Australian children deserve safe, healthy and happy childhoods with opportunities to grow up nourished and well supported in loving and caring environments. However, there appears significant issues in the child protection system and beyond (i.e. legislation and government policy contexts) about how to achieve this vision in the light of the acknowledged challenges and deficits.

The Australian long term policy agenda to be implemented over 11 years recognises the important role of the families in supporting and protecting children. The Commonwealth government stressed that the best way to protect children is to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring in the first place. To do this job, they identified the need to build capacity and strength in the families and communities, across the nation. Family is the natural place where children are born and grow up to become future men and women of the society. The   family

empowerment focused agenda is widely acknowledged in the Children's Chartered Rights (OHCHR, 2007), as well as by the policy makers and academics internationally regarding the significant role of families in the long-term care and protection of children (Department of Health, 2000; Laming, 2003 & 2009; Dumbrill, 2006; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Harris, 2012).

The above discussion highlights the context of transition process of the child protection policies and practices from forensic to family centred ways in some western countries. Australia is no different; here also the transition is noted often in response to Government Inquiries and critical media coverage following significant child protection issues. In relation to the increasing demand for child protection intervention, there are also concerns about how much the impact of social and structural changes in our family systems and its role as a significant institution are taken into consideration.

1.5 Child protection in Queensland

As mentioned previously different states and territories in Australia are responsible for the administration of child protection policy and the development of practice approaches. This section provides a closer examination of the policies and regulations relevant to Queensland, as this state was the site for this project. Queensland is Australia's second largest state, covering 1,722 000 square km and the third most populous with more than 4.5 million inhabitants. The public child protection service in Queensland is operated under the Child Protection Act, 1999 (State of Queensland, 2015), and as in other states, is guided by the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020 discussed above (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). The Queensland child protection system includes some specific policies of relevance to vulnerable families. For example, in recognition of the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in QLD's child protection system, "The Blueprint" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) has been introduced as a state wide strategy. The Blueprint provides child protection services with a strategic framework to implement recommendations by the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Safety Taskforce. The Queensland child protection system is also guided by the UN Conventions of the Rights of Child (OHCHR, 2007). However, despite these structural elements supporting the statutory child protection system, there are concerns around practice and management in the public child protection system.

The two major public inquiry reports, Crime and Misconduct Commission [CMC] Report (State of Queensland, 2004) and Carmody Commission of Inquiry (State of Queensland, 2013) regarding the functioning of the statutory child protection system in Queensland reflect a grim picture. In 2004, the CMC inquiry commissioner reported about systemic failures over several

years and described the Queensland child protection system as virtually in a state of crisis and seriously lacking the capability to respond to child protection issues. The commission made 110 recommendations to improve the functioning of the system with a particular focus on equipping child protection case workers with skills and resources to improve their practice. As a consequence of the inquiry the existing child protection department was abolished and replaced with the new, the Department of Child safety, but there are concerns regarding a real impact of the CMC report in the functioning of the child protection system (Ainsworth and Hansen, 2006).

Around ten years later, the Carmody Commission of Inquiry talked about issues appear not fundamentally different from the CMC report. The Carmody Commission (State of Queensland, 2013 P. X1) stated**:**

> The current child protection system — despite the hard work and good intentions of many and the large amounts of money invested in it since 2000 — is not ensuring the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children as well as it should or could. We have identified three main causes of systemic failure: too little money spent on early intervention to support vulnerable families; a widespread risk-averse culture that focuses too heavily on coercive instead of supportive strategies and overreacts to (or overcompensates for) hostile media and community scrutiny; and, linked with this, a tendency from all parts of society to shift responsibility onto Child Safety.

The criticisms coming from the Carmody Inquiry commission regarding the functioning of the child protection system have mirrored the previous CMC inquiry commission (State of Queensland, 2004), openly criticising the functioning of the child protection system:

> The organisation had failed to equip officers at virtually all relevant levels with the information and skills and resources to make the right decisions in the best interest of Queensland's at risk children and in particular children in the state's protective care (State of Queensland, 2004 p. 7).

What is noticeable in this comment is that the recommendations of the earlier CMC inquiry were dominated by risk management as well as structural improvement but there was no specific focus on supporting and empowering the family or on innovative approaches to connect with families as was noted in similar inquiries in the UK and other international literature (Laming 2003; 2009; Parton, 2010; Munro, 2010; US Department of Health and

Human Services, 2006). The Carmody Commission addresses this issue by acknowledging the important contribution of the families and asked for broader approaches in child protection management (State of Queensland, 2013 p. xv11).

Since the CMC inquiry (State of Queensland, 2004), Queensland, like other Australian states and territories has exposed to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020, which advocates a preventive/collaborative child protection model (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), but in practice the state's child protection system has become skewed towards a more coercive and forensic type of model as noted by the Carmody Commission (State of Queensland, 2013). The system currently operates mainly at the tertiary level, providing for the investigation and assessment of abuse and neglect, court processes, case management and out-of-home care.

The Queensland Child Protection Act, 1999 (State of Queensland, 2015) upholds the principle that all children have a right to be protected from harm. It also respects the right of families to privacy. The legislation confirms that state should only interfere when a child's family is unable or unwilling to fulfil its duties by the child. The preferred way to protect a child, therefore, is by supporting the family as highlighted in the Queensland child protection legislation (State of Queensland, 2015).

This research project explores the connection between child protection practice and policy on building empowerment of vulnerable families in this process. The child protection system in Queensland was duly reviewed during the Carmody Inquiry and was directed to involve families in a way that could provide some real change in the experience of families. This chapter now explores the key concepts important in the research; firstly, the understanding of family will be explored highlighting the diversity embodied in the term, and secondly, the concept of empowerment will be discussed as the cornerstone of alternative policy and practice approaches.

1.6 Family: Diversity and change

Family is the primary institution of our society (Nachster, 2013) and provides a care environment for the long-term growth and development of children. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2011) defines "family" as a group of two or more people that are related by blood, marriage (registered or de-facto), adoption, or fostering and who generally live together in the same household. The ABS (2011) further outlines the structure of a family unit which may include newlyweds without children, gay partners, couples with dependents, grandparents and single men and women with children.

However, this primary institution (i.e. family) has undergone significant socio-economic change processes. In Australia, there has been an increased change in the family system and functioning considering demographic changes amidst a rise in the separation and divorce rates (Tilbury, Osmond, Wilson and Clark, 2007 p. 9). Giddens (2002) also noted the changes in western countries' marriage and family system. Although marriage remains popular, so does divorce. Giddens further stated that more than a third of all births happened outside wedlock, while the proportion of people living alone rose steeply and was likely to rise even more. Up to a quarter of women are aged between 18 and 35 in the UK and other western countries say that they did not intend to have children (Giddens, 2002). Although the views of Giddens (2002), appear to be of a broader perspective, but his statistical evidence over a decade ago highlights the predisposing elements in the changing process of our family system. In light of these sociological factors and an increasingly culturally diverse demographic, there has been concerns regarding impact on people's social and emotional wellbeing nationally (AIHW, 2013). Basu (2015) articulated trans-cultural psychiatric illness among children and young people born in some particular mixed-race families (e.g. Caucasian Australian fathers and mothers from Asian countries) alongside financial and social integration struggles of many vulnerable families. This discussion also has scope for further expansion in light of relationship between motherhood and family and how this may impact in decision making in child protection domain.

The complex changes in the families have been felt internationally. Parton (2010) outlined the situation in the UK where he noted complex changes in the family system where the rate of cohabitation among couples with children reached 13 per cent in 1998, and among those in the lowest in the income distribution scale, the rate was almost double (26 per cent). The concept of lifelong marriage is losing value (Parton, 2010). A new type of family system has emerged in terms of 'social parenting' in which children were being raised in a single parent home or in homes in which one adult, usually the father figure, is not the biological father. There is also literature reporting other family structures, in which children are growing up with grandparents as parental figures (Thorpe and Ramsden, 2014). In the Indigenous families, the concept of families has been expanded in cultural context. Here the parenting responsibilities including critical roles like setting roles and boundaries as well as caring and supervising children are assumed not only by parents, but also by other family members in a child's kinship network such as siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents (Ivec et al., 2012). In the process, the commitment towards the relationships and moral accountability for the wellbeing of the children has transformed (Tilbury et al., 2007; Parton, 2010).

In this changing scenario, marriage and parenthood are no longer seen as being tied together and having a child is increasingly separated from decisions about marriage for growing numbers of people.

However, despite changes in the structure of what is typically known as a family, there is no indication of any alternative option. There has been growing international consensus that the family is the natural place to protect the long-term wellbeing of children (Khan, 2014; Laming, 2009; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2009). In spite of the challenging state of changing social concepts of marriage relationships and parenthood (Parton, 2010; Giddens, 2002), there is a strong sentiment, primarily in the English-speaking countries, that the family is the best place for the care, protection and all-round wellbeing of children. The fundamental principle of the UK's child protection and human rights legislation articulates that children should be cared for within their natural families if at all possible (HMSO, 2004; Office of the High Commissioner's for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2007). The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights described the family as a 'central unit' accountable for the wellbeing of children and it mandated for appropriate policy and legislations to empower and preserve the integrity of the family (OHCHR, 2007). As mentioned earlier, the Australian Federal Government's National Framework for Protecting Australian Children (2009-2020) has put the family in the forefront while acknowledging the shared responsibilities between the family, community, voluntary and statutory services (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). The National Children's Strategy in the Republic of Ireland has recognised the importance of the family for growth and development of children (Pinkerton and Dolan, 2007). The United States Federal Law dictates that the state should take reasonable steps to "preserve and reunify" families before removing a child from its family by focusing on preventative aspects because the struggling parents are themselves often victim of their abusive and adverse life experiences (Reich, 2005 p. 13).

These global propositions which commit to the central role of families in the lives of children provide a convincing argument for statutory policies and processes that support and empower families, as the best way forward for the long-term wellbeing of children. This research project proceeds from this premise also.

1.7 Empowerment: A key concept in child protection

Building on the discussion in context of the changes and consistent recognition of the significant role of families in the care and protection of children, the empowerment of families to undertake this task is an important one. This section examines the concept of empowerment and describes its relevance for this research, which offered arguments for   service

development in terms of lived experiences of families (Harris, 2012; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Wiffin, 2010; Ivec, Braithwaite and Harris, 2012; Khan, 2015). Exploring the perspectives of the parents about their wellbeing and empowerment needs can reflect deeper insight and contribute to the discussion regarding the concept and process of their empowerment (Dumbrill, 2006; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et al., 2012).

The concept of empowerment has received a lot of attention in scholarly literature in the last ten years especially in the context of its application in multiple clinical and social development contexts (Rivest and Moreau, 2014). In social work practice, empowerment has been used as a method of intervention or as a broader philosophy that can guide practitioners in their engagement with service users and their attempts to impact and influence larger communities (Solomon, 1976; Lee, 1996; Rivest and Moreau, 2014). Around 40 years ago, Solomon (1976) in her seminal work on *Black Empowerment* offered practice guidance to work with the Afro-American communities in light of overwhelming social stigma as well as negative social attitudes towards the community groups. Solomon's agenda for practice was aimed at empowering vulnerable people by building up their skills so that they are able to address their difficulties and perform dignified social roles. Solomon has also offered the vision of a society in which every human being is treated fairly and valued (Rivest and Moreau, 2014). This vision has great resonance with this research.

Rappaport (1987) suggested that it is difficult to pinpoint a specific definition of empowerment; however, it can be witnessed when it happens. According to Rappaport, it is not simply the process of empowerment but the impact on people's lives, which can be determined through the tangible empowered outcome. There are several perspectives regarding the process and outcome of empowerment. Carniol (1992 p.1) defined empowerment as a process where a worker acts in a way to enhance the client's resources; to decrease power sharing inequality in worker-client relationships; to explicitly identify structures of oppression; and to actively facilitate a collective consciousness by encouraging accountability for feelings and behaviours which ultimately leads to personal and political change. While this research has approached the discussion more broadly in chapter 4 to build an empowerment framework, the philosophical values of empowerment of this research are also influenced by the critical understanding described above. It argues that to build on the practical experiences of the service users (e.g. the participant families); listening to their voices and using these voices to offer critique and suggestions about the service they receive and scope for future service development.

In this study, the concept of empowerment has drawn on diverse empowerment theories and philosophical values (as broadly discussed and meta-synthesised in chapter 4), in response to and building the discussion on multidimensional needs of the parents, including their

developmental needs and even trans-generational needs. Empowerment can be seen as the transfer of power (Page and Chzuba, 1999) that is evident as a process as well as an outcome. For example, a mother whose child has been removed from her care due to child protection concerns seeks help in improving her parenting skills to demonstrate her changing credibility as the parent. She attends a parenting programme recommended by the child protection services. On successful completion of the course, she applies for custody of her child, who has been in the care system and was successful in her application. In this example, the process of empowerment entails clear direction and nurturing the mother's sense of trust, practical ability and motivation to continue to engage and follow the direction by the child protection services, and the outcome is her actual gaining of ability in attending support services sincerely and being successful in getting custody of her child.

In empowerment, process is as important as the outcome. The process of empowerment is initiated through systemic efforts and the outcome is primarily noticed in the individual (Khan, 2015). In the above example, the mother's positive attitude and engagement can be attributed to a positive service experience amidst empathetic and transparent communication with the case worker, having clear guidance about interventions and support plans as agreed upon in the case conference or family court, a transparent and consistent professional approach in the team and building the mother's receptive capacity in transferring the resources to enhance her practical capacity for care and protection(Collins, 2013).

The philosophical notions of the Australian national framework that children must be able to grow up nourished and supported in loving and caring environment has set a clear agenda in the public policy discussion of empowering the family environment (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Building on the understandings in this framework, family empowerment in the context of child protection may be seen as a humanistic process initiated and led by the case worker, which will allow the family a sense of connection with the service that can build appropriate trust, confidence and hope in their effort to recognise and address parenting difficulties, while nurturing their potentialities to improve quality of life and their caring ability. It is important to acknowledge here that at times even with the best empowering practice some parent's will not engage or admit their child protection issues, and should the children remain in their care, the children will continue to be at risk. These are the issues need deeper professional introspection and reviewing of existing level of service in terms of learning from the families' experiences in context of professionals' efforts. The success of the worker's effort will be evidenced by the family's consistent participation in an effort to seek resources to meet the need for change. If the family is not engaging in the services, it may not be simply about the family's not attending services but also the worker's role needing to be reviewed. This project has attempted to expand the discussion by exploring theoretical approaches of

empowerment in context of practical experiences of a cohort of families of child protection practice.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 has presented the conception of the research leading to the problem formulation in light of a thorough discussion of child protection policy and practice. The rationale and aims of the research are presented. This chapter builds understanding of child protection functioning through family empowerment as a concept. Chapter 2 elucidated the critiques of scholarly literature on issues in child protection policy and practice including the nature of a child - focused forensic approach versus a family empowerment focused agenda. While the literature articulated a vision of a child protection system built on the experiences of families through a relationally based practice framework, it is noted that a more specific understanding about the process of building connection with the "hard to reach" families is needed. This requires a new way of responding to the challenges in child protection service delivery, which sets the background of this research.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology adopted in conducting this qualitative enquiry project. This chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks which guide the study and the rationale of selecting specific methodological processes. The chapter also details the recruitment, data collection and analysis processes, literature guided in approaching the sensitive research topic and limitations of the research. Chapter 4 presents the process and outcome of the meta-synthesis of different empowerment theories and approaches to build an empowerment framework which is used as a lens for mapping the primary data.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings from the interviews with the families who participated in this research and highlights experiences and views of the cohort of families with the public child protection services. The themes and sub-themes are then consolidated into broader themes for the purpose of mapping through the empowerment framework/lens. Chapter 6 has offered the discussion of the findings following mapping of the themes under the empowerment lens. The discussion articulates the unique contribution of this research. The mapped themes, highlight a new way of thinking about professional connection with the families and addresses the disempowering nature of the child protection system. Chapter 7 summarises the research and outlines specific outcomes. Recommendations for future practice policy and research are presented.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter discusses the conception of the research idea informed by the author's professional experiences and presents the research rationale and aims. The chapter also presents a discussion regarding changing trends of the child protection management process internationally from a forensic model to a family focused model. Core concepts relating to understanding of the family system and to the process and outcome of empowerment have also been described. The next chapter discusses the literature review process, which also sets the background of this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter outlines the background literature that underpins the development of the research focus on re-visioning child protection management embedded in family empowerment. The discussion and analysis draws on empirical and grey literature that examines child protection research, policies, and practice issues, to highlight gaps in the current knowledge of this topic. In exploring these areas, an understanding of the broader implications for frontline practice and the resultant impact on families are articulated. Then the chapter critically examines findings from research in the last 10 years in Anglophone countries, which explored the experiences and aspirations of families with public child protection services in building the discussion for a family empowerment informed way forwards.

2.1 Plan for literature review

A literature review is one of the most important steps, not only in problem formulation but also in setting and designing the entire process of the research project (Rubin and Babbie, 2008). This research has examined a number of studies on past and contemporary child protection management issues, inquiry reports and research findings to understand the values of family empowerment focused child protection practice. Although the literature has proposed wide varieties of ideas to address the topic, this study has focused on an empowerment focused approach, which also emerged frequently in the recent research reports. Another purpose of the literature review was to establish a theoretical framework to inform a working theoretical approach within the scope of the study to build the research objectives and the various methods in conducting the study.

The literature search process was primarily conducted through the search engines of the James Cook University's (JCU) online library resources. The google search process was also utilised at times to trace sources i.e. title, abstract, journal/book publication details and then followed up through JCU electronic library resources to download the literature or requesting the library to organise it. The criteria of searching from the several identified search results were reduced by the relevance, purpose and critically balanced discussion/literature consistent with the research topic. The researcher also used different key words like "child protection and family empowerment", "child protection practice issues", "empowerment",

"empowerment approaches/theory", "qualitative research", "meta-synthesis", "critical theory", "critical social theory" etc. while sourcing literature through the search engines. The literature search process was also determined by the relevant sources of information from the references of certain published research papers in peer reviewed journals.

2.2 Child protection policies and investigations

Since the discovery of child abuse in the 1960s, child protection policy and practice has been going through a significant change process in the Anglophone world (Loanne et al., 2009). These continual changes and reforms were prompted by conflicting demands and high profile media outcry in the background of major child abuse concerns, and public child protection services are seen to have failed to deliver effective service (Lonne et al., 2009; Laming, 2009). This upheaval, in parallel, has also witnessed a growing recognition in western countries regarding significant roles of family in child protection (HMSO, 2004; Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Pinkerton and Dolan, 2007; Reich, 2005). This recognition is not just acknowledged in the Anglophone countries, the United Nations have also mandated for the member nations to adopt policy and legislations to support and protect the family (OHCHR, 2007). The increasing thrust on family and its empowerment in critiquing the role and functioning of child protection policy and practice has opened the discussion on two conflicting bases- family and its empowerment focused approach verses risk averse forensic perspective. This research has attempted to expand the discussion on these two often conflicting bases of literature.

In Asian countries, the concept of child protection is often based on socio-cultural values and norms by giving the highest regard and respect to the role of parents. The traditional family values ingrained in multi-cultural and multi-religious social systems play an important part in keeping the family intact through appropriate timely support and advocating the role of family with high regards (Khan, 2015). From among many examples, the preaching of Buddhism (Epstein, 2002)[3] and Islam[4] (Pickthall, 1993) encourage people to protect the institution of family by outlining the role and importance of parents. Here, the significant themes of cultural life are learned within the bosom of a family, which may be joint or nuclear in form but belong to a strong network of supportive kinship ties that promote mutual supports and empowerment

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3   *Itivuttaka*: "'Brahma' is a designation for mother & father. 'The first devas' is a designation for mother & father. 'The first teachers' is a designation for mother & father. 'Those worthy of gifts' is a designation for mother & father. Why is that? Mother & father do much for their children. They care for them, nourish them, introduce them to this world."

4   "Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or more attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say, "my Lord! Bestow on them Thy Mercy, even as they cherished me in childhood." (The Glorious Quran 17: 23,24).

on virtually every aspects of human life under the intact values of the institution (Jacobson, 2004). These claims, however, do not take into account changing socio-economic factors like poverty, gender issue, industrialisation and unplanned urbanisation and their potential impact on the family functioning and values in these countries.

The global literature embedded in philosophical and religious traditions outlines some moral arguments for a family focused approach to support and empower families as a constructive way forward for the long-term wellbeing of children. While the literature offers arguments for family focused child protection policy, the challenges lie in the child protection operation system to be capable of effectively implementing the policies (Dumbrill, 2006; Pinkerton and Dolan, 2007; Wiffin, 2010). It should be able to support the frontline practitioners in the entire process by creating nourished opportunities, which the families can easily access and utilise to nurture their potentialities in a safe and supportive environment (Sen, 2005). The competency of the child protection service largely lies in its pro-family policy and appropriately trained, supported and motivated workforce who are able to connect and fairly serve needy families (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Wiffin, 2010; Ivec, Braithwaite and Harris, 2012). The nourished opportunities seem particularly relevant for the "hard to reach" families alienated from the mainstream (Ivec et al., 2012). In his research in developmental economics, Sen (1999; 2005) presented the concept of nourished opportunities in terms of supportive developmental resources, which the vulnerable people are able to access freely without any stigma and realise through empowering experiences. The nourished opportunities would foster a supportive process to facilitate safe, consistent and helpful communication, taking into consideration the practical, developmental and transgenerational needs of the parents (Sen, 2005). Literature also articulated regarding clarity of process of supporting the families. For example, if there are statutory recommendations for parenting skill development, the family should be given a clear direction about specific areas of training, details about training providers, indicators of successful training, cogent reassurance of honouring the training while addressing practical needs of the parents to enable their attendance (Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Wiffin, 2010; Khan, 2015). While the discussion is offering alternative policy arguments for a family empowerment focused approach, there can be limitation to this perspective, particularly in light of significant chronic socio-emotional, physiological and other issues crippling the capability of parents to engage in the existing developmental change process. The impact of the complex phenomenon in building the policy discussion can be seen not only from the perspective of the families but also from practice management context in demonstrating competency to connect with these families and enhancing their potential to be part of the change process (Forrester, 2008).

As Munro (2010) outlined that the issues of the vulnerable families are often complex, diverse and deep rooted. Ghaffar et al. (2012) and Bunting et al. (2015) highlighted the parents' own experiences of developmental trauma, substance misuse, domestic violence as well as associated social stigma. Johnson and Sullivan (2008) and Ivec et al. (2012) articulated the socio-cultural alienations and increasing risks of the ethnic minorities including the indigenous population of involving with the child protection services. So, the parents may likely to carry enormous socio-emotional burden as accumulated over a long period of time. There is no space for a quick solution through merely short-term crisis based approaches (Munro, 2010; Laming, 2003; 2009). This requires a comprehensive plan to ensure that the intervention has a clear long vision, is structured, therapeutically focused and informed by the families' active participation and continuing contribution from all relevant professionals and agencies (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety [DHSSPS], 2008).

The discourse of policy and practice in the Anglophone world is further reinforced by the repeated revelations from major child protection investigations of avoidable serious harm to children due to child protection management issues (Department of Health and Social Security [DHHS], 1974; Laming, 2003; DHSSPS, 2008; State of Queensland, 2004; 2013). These have raised public concerns over the statutory system's policy and practice approaches which impact on building general stability and the caring capability of families (Lonne et al., 2009; Forrester, 2008; Batty, 2003). Numerous child protection inquiries have exposed how catalogues of deficiencies in forensic/child focused assessment and interventions have put the children at risk of abuse (DHSS, 1974; Laming, 2003; Laming, 2009; Care Quality Commission, 2009; State of Queensland, 2013). These concerns raise fundamental questions regarding the impact of statutory child protection policies, and their realisation in protecting and supporting vulnerable children and parents in the society. There are suggestions that child protection policy must also incorporate scope for managing the struggling parents' past and present life experiences, (psychosexual) relationships, health situations, developmental needs of the child, financial and general stability, support networks and different sociological factors (Department of Health, 2000). There is also literature linking trans-generational trauma and deprivation of the families, including likely involvement with child protection services (Department of Health, 2000; Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010). All of these components are interlinked to the welfare of both the child and family amidst a demand for organising appropriate family support in the background of ongoing protective interventions.

Dumbrill (2006) noted an existence of policy level disharmony between wellbeing of the child and the wellbeing of the parents has potentially contributed to the practice level disconnection between family empowerment and protective interventions (Khan, 2015). Dumbrill (2010) identified two potential solution pathways informed by the families. Firstly, the parents

recognised the need for their empowerment and they came up with the idea of their own union such as the Child Welfare Service Users' Association, a platform that can advocate their case in a united voice to influence CPS policy development. Secondly, they highlighted congruent worker-client communications and relationships as a powerful intervention tool in child protection work. It is widely noted that in most instances, children are better protected when workers and parents build a collaborative relationship and work in alliance (Dumbrill and Lo, 2009; Platt, 2007; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014). The family informed insights are quite significant as most child protection studies have examined the case worker-client relationship from the perspective of service providers, but there are limited studies that examine the phenomena from the perspective of service users (Altman, 2008; Yatchmenoff, 2005). Dumbrill and his colleague's work exposes some critical aspects such as the need to find alternative ways to work with the vulnerable families, to address the structural inequalities in the system and to empower the child protection workers to build much needed connections with the families for a better outcome in service (Dumbrill and Lo, 2009). While Dumbrill (2006;2010) and his colleagues' (Dumbrill and Lo, 2009) made important contribution to the discussion building on the experiences of the families, there needs more clarity how these can be translated into influencing the policy and systemic changes to build congruence between policy and practice embedded in family empowerment.

The debate has been around since 1990s, whether the idea of child protection and family support could go hand in hand in terms of influencing policies and practices (Parton & Mathews, 2001). The professionals and policy makers were concerned regarding the tensions between the two approaches (Parton, 1997). The debate appears to be still ongoing in understanding whether there are any inconsistencies or contradictions between conventional child focused child protection policy and family focused child protection policy. It would be important to explore whether the traditional child focused child protection policy has any connection with an increasing risk averse short term practice perspective even though in the last 10 years a change has been noted with increasing thrust on supporting the families as a constructive way forward for child protection (Dumbrill, 2006; Lonne et al., 2014). Here is an example extracted from a recent major national child protection review in the UK, The Munro Review of Child Protection (Munro, 2011 p.23) sets out some key principles in its report:

> The family is usually the best place for bringing up children and young people, but difficult judgments are sometimes needed in balancing the right of a child to be with their birth family with their right to protection from abuse and neglect.

> The system should be child-centred: everyone involved in child protection should pursue child-centred working and recognise children

and young people as individuals with rights, including their right for
participation in decisions about them in line with their age and maturity.

The two principles seem distinctly important and relevant in each domain but the confusion will start when we try to subsume one category from the territory of the other category. For example, family centered child protection policy entails considering the wellbeing of parents and the children and the process is assumed to progress under a whole of family approach focusing on diverse psychosocial, biological and practical needs of the family (Ghaffar et al., 2012; Wiffin, 2010; Platt, 2008). In this inclusive domain, the wellbeing of each member of the family is important and special needs are appropriately prioritised under cohesive (i.e. united and intact) caring values of a family involving parents, children and supportive extended families. However, in a child centered domain, it may narrow down the focus to only on protection of the child, which carries the potential risks of undermining the needs and aspirations of parents, leading up to their alienation from the child protection system. In spite of the scope of developing a broader approach under the policy, there appears a risk that child centered policy, with increasing focus on getting the process right rather than developing a long-term outcome for children (Munro, 2011), may mislead child protection professional. For example, an inexperienced or fresh graduate new to the field having issues around professional competency and other systemic factors (lack of adequate support, supervision, case load management issues etc.) may be likely to progress with the clinically based narrow vision rather than empirically based broader approach (Ainsworth and Hansen, 2006; Ivec et al., 2012; Lonne et al., 2009). These policy issues seem to need more focus in building evidence based clarity. There is no doubt that the broader objectives and the principles of the Munro Review (Munro, 2011) have enhanced scope for child centred approach. However, there is a clear need for more discussion regarding maintaining a balance between these principles with the empowerment needs of parents under the vision of protecting long term wellbeing of children in their natural family home.

The discussion acknowledges significant rationale of family focused policy by linking protection and wellbeing of children with the wellbeing of parents. An experiment undertaken in Western Australia (Parton and Mathews, 2001) suggests that a practice strategy, with a fine balance between child protection and family support, caused a substantial drop in child protection referrals. The findings suggest, the level of allegation on neglect was reduced from 38% to 19% but allegation of sexual abuse based reporting increased from 22% to 38%, which can be seen as a sign of confidence in the community in addressing underlying critical issues (Parton and Mathews, 2001 p. 105). Parton and Mathews (2001 p. 97) described this as "moving beyond the narrow forensic concerns" with the child protection investigation and

giving greater emphasis to family support and providing services to the families on a basis of partnership.

The family support approach has been well reflected in British social policies. The previous New Labour government's policy, with respect to children and families, has shown a growing emphasis for investment in the families who are likely to be high in lifetime costs to the state (Spratt, 2009). The previous Labour government asserted the need for prioritising struggling families and targeted them for special investment (Blair, 2006). The Government's commitment was reflected in the policy agendas: Every Child Matters (Department of Education and Skills, 2003); Policy Review of Children and Young People; A Discussion Paper (HM Treasury and Department for Education and Skills, 2007) and social investment state policy focusing on protecting children and families (Spratt, 2009) through investment in human capital wherever possible (Giddens, 1998). Building on the past policies, the recent policy document, "Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children" (HMSO, 2015 p.12) has outlined a further clear process of supporting the children and families. The partnership based safeguarding policy has identified the following process as an initial response to support and empower families:

1. Early help
2. Identifying children and families who would benefit from early help
3. Effective assessment of the need for early help
4. Provisions of effective early help services
5. Information sharing

However, in spite of these positive safeguarding policies there are still concerns on the domain of actual impact on the practice front in reaching out and empowering the "hard to reach" families (Forrester, 2008; Ivec, 2012).

2.3 Disconnection between policy and practice

The issue of disconnection between policies and ground level service provision could not be eliminated. The families' lack of realisation of the policies was revealed in the compelling report from Ofsted[5], which found that 282 vulnerable children, many of them known to social services, died in the 17-month period before August 2008 (Ofsted, 2008). In another cogent report, the Ofsted's chief inspector of schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw has made emotive appeal that   the

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[5] The term Ofsted stands for *Office for Standards in Education*, Children's Services and Skills. The department inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages in the UK.

child protection chief functionaries must show "political and moral courage" to tackle widespread child sexual abuse in Britain's towns and cities, despite intense pressure on budgetary funding allocations (The Guardian, 2015). The chief inspector's report not only identify gaps in the service but acknowledge significant challenges associated with the services of empowering the vulnerable families, which needs political as well as moral will in the policy and system domains.

In the UK, Victoria Climbie was tortured to death on the very day social services closed the case, presuming no more child protection risk (Forrester, 2008; Laming, 2003). The commission of inquiry attributed this tragedy as a systemic issue, "I am forced to conclude that the principle failure to protect her (Victoria Climbie) was the result of widespread organisational malaise" (Laming, 2003 p.16). Six years later, in the course of the Baby Peter inquiry, the Laming commission reiterated the practice and management issues as opportunity to re-envisioning the balance between policy and practice, "Decision making about the rights of parents and the needs of children…is the local government responsibilities…. the performance and effectiveness of the managers should be assessed against the quality of outcomes for the most vulnerable children" (Laming, 2009 p. 18).

In spite of having opportunities for developing family oriented child protection policy, the statutory mechanisms have not been able to connect and engage with the developmental scopes (Ghaffar et al., 2012; Harris, 2012). The disconnection between policy and actual ground level practice can also be seen in light of the overreliance of checklist based formulistic procedures as often imposed on the frontline child protection practitioner (Laming, 2003; Harris, 2012). Gillingham (2014) in his research on the impact of Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools[6] following policy reforms in Australia, noted that it does not meet the broader purpose of safeguarding the interest of most needy and targeted children like the Indigenous populations. Lonne et al. (2009) noted that while incorporation of sophisticated technical tools has supported the organisations' policies on surveillance and auditing functions, but on the practice front it has encouraged a culture of undue proceduralism, which has reduced professional creativity as well as empirically driven scope of service. Gillingham (2014) also noted there is no evidence that it promotes consistency, rather it carries risks of being manipulated by professionals devoid of ethical practice values. This narrow and isolated structured perspective in understanding social phenomenon is not current. Nearly 30 years ago, critical social theorist and sociologist Habermas (1986) had spoken against instrumental reasoning and technological interpretation and assessment of the social problems, and also advocated for philosophical interpretations of social sciences (Ngwenyama, 2002). Understanding the often very complex social and emotional issues of vulnerable families need

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[6] A conceptual and analytical tool developed for the frontline practitioners for child protection risk assessment, which was introduced in statutory child protection assessment in Queensland (Gillingham, 2014).

a broader approach and a qualitative assessment of the experiences rather than using structured questionnaires (Gillingham, 2014).

In terms of support and empowerment, Ainsworth and Hansen (2011) in their research, reviewed four studies, respectively, in Queensland; Western Australia; South Australia and New South Wales between 2007-2009 and saw a broader issue in terms of a lack of family empowerment focused practice and the consequent negative impact on the families' capability to care and protect. Ainsworth and Hansen (2011) noted that parents felt powerless by the arbitrary behaviour and discrediting attitude of child protection caseworkers and their managers.

These practice issues can be linked to some of the outcomes of recent Carmody investigation report (State of Queensland, 2013). The Carmody Inquiry Commission (State of Queensland, 2013) noted 185% increase in child protection referral, which increased public spending costs to 174%. The statistical data reaffirms the presence of disconnection between the objective functioning of the child protection system, empowerment needs and aspirations of the families and the increasing negative service outcomes in the society.

Lonne (2013) noted the child protection system in dire need of reform while articulating the disconnection between the policy and ground level practice outcome as the central issues with regard to system's hierarchical structure and culture influenced by factors such as power, status, moralistic attitude amidst massive flow of referral and those in out of home care system. This is also echoed in the report of Australian Institute of Family Studies, which called for "evolving" the system to prioritise supports to the children and families so that children can be safely cared for in their own home (Higgins, 2011). Meanwhile, the Laming inquiry commissions have recommended several structural changes in inter-organisational domains, which all are primarily directed to re-empower the child protection systems in engaging with vulnerable families and children and imparting effective services (Laming, 2003; 2009). The statutory inquiries articulate the rights of the families in shaping family focused policy agendas, even though it is very easy to be overwhelmed by the forensic elements of the cases. The child protection inquiries (Victoria Climbie and Baby Peter) explain when and how the child protection system needs to respond (Spratt, 2009) consistent with the long-term wellbeing needs of the family and child. The Laming inquiries (2003; 2009) have identified that the room for supporting the parents was present while maintaining the children in safe care, but neither were appropriately explored due to multiple intra and inter organisational policy issues (Laming, 2003; 2009). The inquiries have raised fundamental questions regarding the quality of coherence between the statutory child protection functioning and its realisation by the children and families. The shortcomings reflected through the case reviews reiterate the need for a relook at the current child protection practice and operation policy, not just what went

wrong but what can be done to re-connect and revive sustainability in the family care (Ghaffar et al., 2012; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Harris, 2012). The Carmody inquiry commission has related the current child protection functioning as one of the vexing areas of public policy, which the commission attributed to increasing risk averse practice culture heavily relying on coercive and over reactive strategies rather than supporting families (State of Queensland, 2013). This research has made an attempt to understand more about these inconsistencies in policy and practice through the experiences of a cohort of families.

2.4 Literature on families' experiences

Some scholarly works in the last over 10 years have been noted in the specific area, exploring the families' experiences with public child protection services. The research projects (Dumbrill, 2006; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Harris, 2012; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Dale, 2004; Wiffin, 2010; Ivec et al., 2012) were methodologically similar (qualitative analysis, mostly undertaken through in-depth interview method) but conducted on diverse cross-cultural population groups (mixed, gender and culture specific cohort) in different parts of the world, with different sample sizes ranging between 9 to 45. In relation to sample size, researchers (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Dumbrill, 2006) discussed their struggle in recruiting participants, which reinforces the complexity of this area and needs more exploration and understanding of the resistance of the families.

However, there have been consistent perspectives from the literature that if we are to improve public child protection services, we need to listen to the families as the services are primarily meant for the families and their empowerment (Dumbrill, 2006; Dale, 2004; Wiffin, 2010; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Harris, 2012; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Ivec et al., 2012). The families are the owners, direct witnesses and natural consultants of their circumstances. So, there is a moral obligation for the child protection services to be guided by the views and aspirations of the families. The argument for family informed protective intervention is also reinforced by the complex nature of the job requiring careful decisions with long-term vision, or else risk of multiple negative impacts on the family (e.g. separation and loss, stigma and social dis-reputation) and the resultant impact on the parents and children (Wiffin, 2010).

The families' alienation and sense of deprivation during statutory child protection involvement has been well documented (Laming, 2003 and 2009; Forrester, 2008; Reich, 2005). Several studies have outlined the families' struggle to engage with services on different areas (Dumbrill, 2006; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Harris, 2012; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Dale, 2004; Wiffin, 2010; Ivec et al., 2012). The research studies

also highlighted a pattern of gradual deterioration in the views and aspirations of the families, over the time periods, about the quality of child protection services (Dumbrill, 2006). In the 1980's, Thoburn (1980) in the UK, noted 95% of parents expressed their satisfaction with the child protection interventions, Fryer, Bross and Krugman (1990) in the USA observed 74% reported satisfaction with their experiences, whilst Dumbrill (2006), in his research in Canada noted a further deterioration to mixed responses. Dale (2004) in his study in UK also noted a mixed response. Wiffin (2010 p.47) in her research in the UK, did not make any quantitative percentile reports, however she implies a downturn when she describes the experiences of the families with child protection services with the following comment; "much of what was said was sad and disappointing". Ghaffar et al. (2012) in another UK based research, noted a slightly better picture in that parents with allegations of substance misuse were more positive about the intervention process but the parents with allegations of sexual abuse and domestic violence were less positive. The Australian research studies also noted a similar pattern of experience reported by the families. The research conducted by Harris (2012) noted a mixed response in parents' experience with child protection services, which some parents felt were helpful but a significant number noted that they were not treated fairly. However, in the research conducted by Ivec et al. (2012 p.80) with Indigenous Australians, the experience of the families with the local child protection services were so negative that the researchers were concerned that the impact may have wider social and political ramifications. Ivec and her colleagues (2012 p.80) outlined, "the descriptions of encounters with the (child protection) authorities challenged the public hope for reconciliation between government and Indigenous Australians". So, since the 1980s, there seems to have been a deteriorating pattern in the experience of the families with the child protection services in Anglophone countries. As discussed in chapter 1, since 1997, there have been 42 major inquiries into the functioning of the child protection system amidst failures, tragedies, and scandals with inquiry-led reform (Lonne, 2013). The Commonwealth of Australia (2009) noted the alarming increase of child abuse and neglect across the states and territories as a national concern. The Federal Australian government also acknowledged that the statutory child protection systems are struggling under the increasing work load. The recent Carmody child protection enquiry commission in Queensland (State of Queensland, 2013) noted a sharp increase in child protection notifications.

These studies have also articulated the voices of the families about their service experiences, which can be linked in different context, policy and systemic reform and building connection between child protection policy and practice (Lonne, 2012; Laming, 2009). This part of the discussion, as already broadly articulated in the chapter, has refined the flow of the discussion in specific term to reinvigorate the argument, which has set the background of the present research. The outcome of the past research projects (Dumbrill, 2006; D'Cruz and Gillingham,

2014; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Harris, 2012; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Dale, 2004; Wiffin, 2010; Ivec et al., 2012) outlined a clear consistency in most of its findings in terms of the experiences of the child protection service by families irrespective of gender, cultural and geographical diversity in the cohort.

In view of the significant child protection practice and policy issues, here are some relevant areas, which need attention for effective implementation of family empowerment focused agendas.

2.5 Engagement with families

Scholarly works in the last 10 years have strongly recommended for advanced levels of engagement with the families to facilitate appropriate child protection intervention embedded in empowerment (Wiffin, 2010; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Harris, 2012; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Dale, 2004). Engagement is a two-way road; the quality of professional practice is as important as the client's sense of trust and confidence in the system and its intervention. Platt (2007) noted the case **w**orker's congruent and co-operative relationship with the clients was the prime factor that influences the quality of child protection intervention and outcomes. Farmer and Owen (1998) outlined the importance of agreement being reached between parents and case workers in the early intervention stage regarding diverse aspects of engagements. This is to establish the clarity of plan (e.g. who, when, what, how) and future intervention with the participation of the parents and carers. Vulnerable parents who are struggling with their parenting skills and their own needs, deserve to be treated with appropriate respect and empathy (General Social Care Council [GSCC], 2009) as a starting point of engaging them in the empowerment process. It is important to have a collaborative approach, building on their strengths and taking account of their views and experiences (Ghaffar et al., 2012; Harris, 2012; Dale, 2004). The discussion on engagement issues has been looked at from the perspective of compatibility. The term 'compatibility' (Moore, 2007 p. 203) has been defined as an ability for coexistence as needed to connect with the "hard to reach" vulnerable people under the values of unconditional positive regard and congruent communications (Cherry, Carpenter, Water, Hawkins, Satterwhite, Stepien, Ruppelt and Herring, 2008; Itzhaky and Dekel, 2008; Forrester et al., 2008). In developing the emotional skills, Tham and Meagher (2009)'s study in Sweden noted the value of a collective initiative (i.e. a group based support approach) in building working conditions that foster worker's emotional resilience and compatibility. However, Tham and Meagher (2009) noted a significantly lower mean score in the area of "feeling mastery" in the human services industry in Sweden, which they attributed to the deficit in the leadership and

operational management in building appropriate working conditions (Tham and Meagher, 2009 p. 817). The similar experience noted in the UK context by Morrison (2007) who attributed organisational or systemic support factors and individual life experiences in building the emotional intelligence or resilience linked to compatibility. In the discipline of human resource management, emotional skills and competence are seen as "trust, flexible working practice and employee empowerment", which are built collectively at work through "new ways of working" (i.e. empirically orientated and bringing creativity) as a strategy for human resource optimisation (Peters, Poutsma, Beatrice, Bakker and DeBruijn, 2014 p. 272). In integrating the interrelated approaches on fostering the socio-emotional engagement skills of the practitioners, there emerges a clarity that intense human engagement skills are built in a group domain, through collective approaches and initiatives of the services. These literatures have supported in understanding and analysing the alienation of families in public CPS (as identified in recent literature) and making sense of policy response, particularly about the specific process of building capability in practice.

2.6 Communication with families

In context of appropriate engagement, good communication skills are fundamental and are at the heart of best practice in social work (Trevithick, Richard, Ruch, Moss, Lines and Manor, 2004). The initiative of positive communication with vulnerable parents and carers, could be challenging due to their difficult circumstances. However, this is part of professional responsibility: to establish a realistic knowledge based on the case scenario and create opportunities for future changes through smooth (consistent, respectful and empathetic) communications (Johnson and Sullivan, 2008). Forrester et al. (2008), in their research in three local authorities in London (UK) on a sample of 400 consecutive referrals identified child protection workers' poor quality of communication as causing potential concerns in practice because it enhances a lack of consistency in the responses that parents receive. Forrester et al. (2008) noticed, the social workers' communications issues were driven by exclusive focus on concerns, and clients became entrenched in denying them, minimising them, and finding it very difficult to face them, in some cases even becoming abusive.

Lack of communication has also been observed in a multi-agency coordination context (Johnson and Sullivan, 2008). Holt, Grundon and Paxton (1998) expressed concern regarding the communication and decision-making at child protection case conferences. Minty and Pattinson (1994) recognised this practice as a culture of underestimating the seriousness of child protection issues in systemic context. Multi-agency communication should be based on appropriate coordination, clarity of roles, clarity of focus, clear vision and leadership (Atkinson,

Doherty and Kinder, 2005; Catchpole, 2008) to maintain consistency in communication between the struggling families and child protection system.

2.7 Family supports

Contemporary research literature internationally (UK, Australia and US) on child protection, which explored the experiences and aspirations of the families have strongly advocated for organising practical support with adequate information as a part of effective interventions (Wiffin, 2010; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Dale, 2004). Lack of family support contributes to a potential imbalance in the child protection process (Jones and Gupta, 1998). The UK Department of Health's practice guidance articulates that family support services are meant to empower the families struggling to protect their children from basic care, safety, specific developmental needs (if any) and impact of parents' own social and emotional wellbeing (Department of Health, 2000). Ferguson (2001) emphasized practical supports to be offered to the parents such as respite care, day care, family/community networks and forms of material aids. Respite support is particularly crucial for parents of children with special needs. The UK practice guidance has highlighted that these vulnerable families are often referred to local social services as children in need, but due to the constraints of resources in child protection, parents receive little or no service (Department of Health, 1995). The Australian National Policy framework has also acknowledged the issues and pledged for a broader supportive approach that parents, families and communities should be empowered and the country would ensure these rights and entitlements are upheld (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).

Jones and Gupta (1998) argued that given the multiple problems that many vulnerable parents face, their needs can frequently dominate and they become the primary client. But this is often not acknowledged due to the priority on children in need, even though there are broader policies to accommodate family focused agenda. However, what we see is an imbalance and tension in the management of child protection and family support which has not only reflected the incoherence between policy and practice, but is also causing substantial social and economic cost to the state (Parton, 1997; Bunting et al., 2015). The difference between process and outcome of family support and child protection also needs clarity, for example, supporting a child's high developmental needs in statutory care may not be considered family support if the family is excluded from any simultaneous empowerment intervention. Following the CMC inquiry report in Queensland, Australia (State of Queensland, 2004), child protection was separated from the family support service, which, inconsistently, became service purchaser from non-governmental sectors rather than service provider (Gillingham, 2009).

This service purchase policy from voluntary sectors needs to be reviewed to ascertain if the voluntary service providers are actually able to resource and support their staff to connect and empower the many families with compelling needs (Lonne et al., 2014). Meanwhile, Tilbury (2005) had criticised this move, as the system had not only lost the control in providing most crucial services for its vulnerable families but focused more on forensically based child protection, rather than family support. The cost of service purchase is noted to have significantly increased from 159 million dollars in 2004-05 to 395 million dollars just a year later, 2005-06 (Gillingham, 2009). In 2013, the Tim Carmody Inquiry Commission in Queensland, noted the cost of service purchase from external services had increased to 569.1 per cent since 2003–04 (State of Queensland, 2013 p. x1).

Similar issues, in a slightly different context, were noted in other parts of the world in terms of socio-economic costs to the nation. The UK Government's policy paper "Building on Progress: Families" gives an estimation that vulnerable families experiencing five or more disadvantages can cost the state between £55000 and £115000 per family per year (Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Taskforce, 2007). In 2012, Bunting et al. (2015 p.2) referred a statutory impact estimation, which suggests 120000 troubled families whose lives are in chaotic situations have cost the UK government around 9 billion UK pound in one year (HMSO, 2012). A report from the UK Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Taskforce (2007) outlined how vulnerable families are becoming a burden on society through lost economic contribution, poor health, anti-social behaviour and poor social cohesion. This contradicts the New Labour policy on the privileging of particular family forms and concentration on the task of parenting as key to their investment strategy (Spratt, 2009). This critical scenario once again stresses the need to support vulnerable families at the first opportunity. The successful Western Australian model, referred to as "New Directions in Child Protection and Family Support'' has put increased emphasis on engaging with vulnerable parents and carers in planning and provision of supportive and empowering services (Parton and Mathews, 2001).

2.8 Way forwards

2.8.1 Relationally based practice approach

In view of the complex experience of the families, several recommendations were made in recent literature to address the child protection practice issues in supporting and empowering the families during assessment and interventions. Dumbrill (2006) outlined that child protection workers should be able to acknowledge power imbalances and the impact on parents, to not use power coercively, that preventative differential responses should be prioritised and the child protection system must understand the parent's experience in improving the service.

Dumbrill (2006) emphasised the need for building appropriate professional competence (i.e. knowledge, skills, values, experience and confidence) among the front-line practitioners while outlining scope for improving the child protection management informed by the families.

In Australia, D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014) recommended for improving practice under the values and skills of social work as a profession to build up supportive interpersonal relationships with the clients in guiding through the statutory and legal process. The researchers advocated for Australia to adopt social work as a principal professional discipline for frontline child protection work in line with the other Anglophone countries (Ainsworth and Hansen, 2006; Munro, 2011; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014). The recent Australian research (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014) strongly recommended for child protection workers to go beyond the generic inter-personal relationships in engaging with the families. These recommendations for intense parent-worker relationships appear consistent with Johnson and Sullivan's (2008) recommendations for the use of therapeutic relationship skills in a psychotherapy context such as those used in a mental health setting to build rapport with clients with genuineness, honesty and unconditional positive regards (Axline, 1989). The work of de Boer and Coady (2006) identified soft, mindful and judicious use of power as well as humanistic attitude and style have potential to facilitate improved worker-client relationships.

Reimer (2014) approached this in terms of friendship-like characteristics to build highly personalised professionally driven relationships. Building on his research, regarding reunification partnerships between birth parents and foster carers, Ankersmit (2016) articulated a collaborative approach building on trust, motivation, willingness, knowledge and agreement to facilitate the relationships with the families. Harris (2012) recommended that the child protection agencies and families need to engage cooperatively to enhance the wellbeing of children. Harris (2012) suggested that there needs to be a review of the current child protection model due to concerns that it alienates and confuses the families. He also asked for an overhaul of the child protection leadership structure, which the researcher described as having a need for a "paradigm shift" in child protection management policy. In another Australian research, which specifically focused on the Indigenous population, Ivec et al. (2012) advocated for supporting and empowering parents to become stable parents, which has long-term benefits for a society as the benefits go beyond the family. They compared the process and outcome of investment in the family as being much like investing in education. The researchers recommended for structural reform in the child protection operational system (Ivec et al., 2012 and Harris, 2012) to accommodate a down-top approach (Munro, 2010) to ensure that shared and agreed goals with the families are honoured, achieved and restorative justice prevails.

In a UK based research, Ghaffar et al. (2012) recommended for building effective partnership between the service and the families. While they felt that the families should be involved in decision making, they emphasised the value of feedback from parents in future service development. The researchers were not satisfied with the current level of training and skills of the social workers and recommended for the workers to develop skills in empathetic engagement and strength based assessment to enhance the families' participation alongside effective risk management. They advocate for reviewing the current social work education model with a view to upgrading it, as to meet the increasing demand of the services in child protection management.

Consistent with Ghaffar et al. (2012) and Platt (2008)'s relationally based practice approach informed by the psychotherapy literature, Platt (2008) also argued that child protection workers achieve advanced competency by developing skills such as sensitivity, honesty, straight forwardness and listening, which are also aligned with therapeutic skills (Axline, 1989). The articulated practice values for relationship building reinforces the basic professional attributes of social work discipline to undertake tertiary level human service practice (AASW, 2010; Ainsworth and Hansen, 2006). Dale (2004) recommended for Child Protection Services as per the views of the parents (Dumbrill, 2006; Ghaffar et al., 2012) and this also should be considered in the quality control drive of child protection services. Dale also felt the necessity to build up engagement skills of the child protection practitioners (Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Ghaffar et al., 2012) to improve the quality of the service. The literatures have offered a range of clinically driven perspectives in addressing the engagement skill building needs in practice, which are important for the compelling service demand. But the issues are not simply isolated and individualistic but deserve a systemic vision. So, there needs to have a discussion, which is empirically driven that can offer a systemic policy response to create a culture that value the connection within the team and externally (i.e. with stakeholders, clients like families) and regular learning to build emotional skills and compatibility (Moore, 2007; Tham and Meagher, 2009; Cherry et al., 2008; Munro, 2010).

2.8.2 Empathetic practice approach

So, the quality of services seems to be linked with ensuring connecting with the clients, on human level amidst appropriate practical supports, to inform their realisation of the services and remained engaged. This discussion offered a range of measures to build empathetic practice. Dale (2004) emphasised the needs for preventative service in terms of crisis support and respite care for families in need. In another UK based research, Wiffin (2010) recommended for empathetic practice with understanding to the extent of how it feels to   be

on the other end of the child protection system. Wiffin, (2010) advocated for family focused services citing that a parent's wellbeing is interlinked with the wellbeing of the child and asked for an informal approach in the process of undertaking investigation/assessment and family support. Wiffin (2010) recommended for listening to family members for the purpose of future service development (Dumbrill, 2006; Ghaffar et al., 2012), conducting family group conference (Harris, 2012), providing practical support (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et al. 2012 and Dale, 2004). Wiffin (2010) also recommended preventative services be developed (Dumbrill, 2006; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014) rather than crisis led services. There is a consistency in evidence that reiterates advocating and supporting the families in hard times as it is difficult for them to represent themselves; building trust, understanding and relationships with them should be the key focus and services should be available locally (Wiffin, 2010; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Harris, 2012; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Dale, 2004). The mixed responses (a mixture of positive and negative experiences of the families) as noted in some studies are primarily from the countries where social work is already a mandatory qualification for frontline child protection work (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014). Platt (2008) however noted some value in a risk averse coercive approach as it was essential to rescue children from abuse or potential abuse. However, there is clear evidence that the risk averse coercive practice approach has contributed to increasing child protection notifications and protective interventions (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Service, 2003; Dumbrill, 2006; Lonne et al, 2014; AIHW, 2013; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008). The discussion reinforces the argument for family informed pro-active approach evidenced by the families' sense of support, comfort, trust, congruent communications, integrations and hope through positive engagement with the frontline workers.

In a UK based research, Ghaffar et al. (2012) described some families' experience in multiagency case conferences as 'daunting and intimidating' and highlighted the lack of adequate therapeutic support for the children and parents, which they attributed to the deficit model in the child protection assessment framework that failed to connect with or inspire the families. In other research, Platt (2008) stated that the experiences of the families with the child protection services may be characterised by the more coercive or less coercive relationships between the workers and the families. Platt (2008) described that building partnerships in a complex regime of child protection are a contested process and notoriously difficult to achieve for the social workers without significant therapeutic skills and competence as per psychotherapy literature (Axline, 1989; Becker-Weidman and Hughes, 2008). Yet another research project in the UK, Wiffin (2010) explored both sides of the story, by exploring the experiences of the families with the child protection services as well as the experience of the child protection social workers with the families. The experiences of the families were

dominated by their anger and frustration with the system that they considered to be hostile and oppressive, and these perceptions had an impact on the views they expressed. The 'stand-off' position between service users and professionals concerning problems, needs and services due to disagreement and perceived failure of understanding by the professionals and disagreement about their needs lay behind the family members' attitude of resistance (Wiffin, 2010). The fear of the consequences of traumatic impact, the sense of suspicion and mistrust and the formality of the processes are clearly expressed by the families and children. On the other side, the social workers felt that providing social work services in the current climate amidst public and media scrutiny was complex and, because of the many child death inquiries, they had to work hard to gain the trust of family members (Wiffin, 2010). In light of the lack of appropriate support from their own team, the workers often feel pressured to work in partnership with people who they saw to be in very real need, whilst being suspicious about what they might be hiding or becoming scapegoats (Blythman, 2009; Wiffin, 2010).

While the literatures in the last 10 years have critiqued and identified the systemic functioning issues in light of disconnection between policy and frontline practice, but there is no comprehensive discussion offered in elaborating any process about building public policy and the systems in different domains (e.g. Executive, judiciary and systemic levels) in improving service experiences of the families. The literature also critically reflected on engagement, communication and family support issues but these do not articulate any extended in-depth diversified discussions about the reasons of alienations of the families and process of empowering the vulnerable families, to what extent theses are frontline practice, governance or policy issues and potential pathways to connect with the often hard to reach alienated families.

In spite of the complex ground realities like increasing notifications, practice management issues as well as increasing public spending, there still appears to lie a radical sentiment in favour of a coercive approach. For example, Platt (2008) did not see all negative outcomes of the risk adverse child protection practice, even though the deteriorating experiences of the families are widely acknowledged. According to Platt (2008) 80% of children in Victoria became better off (following safe removal from care) due to the benefits of a risk reduction approach. Any different approach as well as argument is important for expanding the discussion but needs to be reviewed in the context of long-term care and wellbeing of the children, the rationale of children's growing up in their natural environment (HMSO, 2004; OHCHR, 2007). In Australia, D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014) in their research in Victoria noted the "Domino effect", which refers to intricate practical and relationship repercussions in the lives of the families in the context of unsupportive professional relationships. Harris (2012), while acknowledging some families' positive experiences, criticised the formal   assessment

approach which alienated several families. Thus, the benefits of new innovations like the family involvement in case conferences, family group conferences(FCG) and models of a differential response are not adequately realised by many families (Haris, 2012).

2.8.3 Working with Indigenous families

Increasing involvement of Indigenous families with public child protection services (AIHW, 2015) set the rationale for more scholarly discussion regarding social and historical experiences of the Indigenous families in developing appropriate public policy and systemic response. The historical removal of Indigenous children from their parents in traumatic circumstances and placing them in children's home based on statutory legislative order in 1958 have left significantly profound effects not just on those children but on the whole community, which is also infamously regarded as "Stolen Generations" scars (Ivec et al., 2012). The communities' experiences of intergenerational trauma, leading up to entrenched socio-economic adversities have created significant vulnerability in the Indigenous families in rebuilding their trust and capability to engage with any empowerment programme (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). The famous "National Apology" by the Australian federal government emerged as a starting point for reconciliation and rebuilding confidence in the Indigenous communities and can be seen as a credible effort to reconnect the alienated community with the national mainstream. However, an Australian research project, which specifically focused on the experiences of Indigenous families with the public child protection services, Ivec et al. (2012) described the encounters as procedural injustice amidst a lack of communication and a lack of interest to identity affirmation and relationship building, which the authors noted as having far broader consequences in social, emotional as well as in political terms. It is vital to build a continuous deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the families in general, focusing not only on the flawed aspects but the steps that can be taken to improve the experiences of the families and communities. This research has opted for a different approach and attempted to provide a critical lens on the policy and practice level functioning in the system in finding empowerment focused way forwards informed by the families.

2.8.4 Qualifications and training factors in practice

It is important to note that unlike Australia, all the Anglophone countries, including the UK, have adopted social work as a principal professional discipline to undertake frontline child protection service (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014). While arguing for skills and competency development of frontline practitioners, some researchers have gone further and made specific reference to structuring the primary professional qualifications of the practitioner having social

work as a starting point in building argument for invoking more ethically driven human service values in practice (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ainsworth and Hansen, 2006; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Munro, 2011). Considering the critical experiences of families in CPS, the discussion can be seen more in light of attempting to evolve a connection between the suffering and aspirations of the families and improvement in service and procedural justice in child protection intervention (Ivec et al., 2012; Reich, 2005; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008). The research studies have been advocating for the strengthening of the child protection system as a way forward for service improvement.

If the experience of the social work professionals with appropriate professional ethics and practice skills for frontline child protection work appeared so challenging, one can imagine the challenge of non-social work trained staff. This challenge can be experienced by professionals likely to operate under the demand of tertiary level practice competency and procedural justice (Ivec et al., 2012; Ainsworth and Hansen, 2006). However, there will always be exceptions though, like a non-social work trained staff having no formal and appropriate tertiary level qualifications in the human service discipline area may perform at a superior level for various reasons such as personal attributes (e.g. personal interest, passion, past experiences) and advanced level team support etc. or are professionally trained in another tertiary discipline like psychology. It is also important to acknowledge that by changing the entry level qualification with regards to social work discipline may not guarantee the solution of the entire frontline practice issues, as a social work trained staff may underperform due to various individual, policy and systemic reasons (Batmanghelidjh, 2009).

However, despite establishing a clear rationale for strength based practice in partnership with the families, the literature examined did not provide guidance on how to facilitate effective engagement and transfer of power between the professionals and families. The researchers talked about several clinical techniques like listening to the families, informal approach, engagement, relationally based approach, empathetic practice, therapeutic relationship building, procedural justice but no substantive discussion was offered on policy and system level processes in establishing the necessary human connection with the most vulnerable and sometimes "hard to reach" families (e.g. the families who struggles to engage with service), which is above and beyond any simple engagement (Ivec et al., 2012). The outcome of the literature review has underpinned the research question and the consequent aims of this study. Consistent with recent research, although this study focuses on exploring the experience of the families in Queensland, Australia with public child protection intervention, it fills a gap in the literature. The existing research of this nature discussed the necessity (and offered some techniques) of empowering the families and the child protection system but did not consolidate the findings objectively in structuring a process of empowerment from the

perspectives of the families. This study aims to approach and map the experience of the families within an empowerment framework to understand if any constructive way forward, as imagined by the families, is possible.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented the overall experiences of the impact of practice and policy issues in building a discussion on family informed child protection practice. It has been noted through the literature review that the issues in the practice domain seems to be more systemic rather than just in frontline practice. It is also noticeable that the concept for family informed and family empowerment based child protection practice, as has been, is not new but has been around for several decades as reflected in the past as well as contemporary literature. It has also emerged through the literature that there may have been connections between risk-averse, short-term, goal oriented (purely child focused) child protection management and the families' poor experiences, including alienation from services as well as escalation in child protection reporting and investigations. The chapter also reflected on whether there are any tensions/contradictions between child focused child protection policy and family focused policy in the process of family empowerment and long term vision in child protection management. The researcher also reflected on the child protection practice issue considering training and qualifications of frontline workers. Drawing on research literature in the last 10 years in the Anglophone countries, there appears a uniform view that child protection management should be guided by views and aspirations of the families. As a process of building family directed services, the literature recommended that the public child protection system should be connected (i.e. tertiary level engagement) with families under a relationally based empathetic approach, which is much ahead of simple engagement. In consolidating the findings and recommendations into future policy pathways, the focus has been listening to the families in building frontline practitioners' skills and competency development in group and systemic ways as well as policy development for effective governance.

Building on the literature review, the next chapter discusses the methodology of the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the background and plan for undertaking the research. It outlines the theoretical frameworks, which inform the method including the plan for recruitment of participants, data collection, data analysis and interpretation of the study. The chapter also outlines ethical dilemmas, issues around approaching sensitive research topics and limitations of the study.

3.1 Setting the scene

The study was conceived, nurtured and informed by the researcher's practice experience and literature review. It aimed to explore the topic of re-visioning child protection practice embedded in family empowerment from the experiences of families with the public child protection services. Given the demand of capturing the in-depth experiences as well as feelings and aspirations of the respondent families, a qualitative enquiry method was adopted as the most appropriate method in analysing the data (Rubin and Babbie, 2008), but the process did not end here. As the researcher wanted to view the experiences of the families through an empowerment lens, a working empowerment framework was developed against meta-synthesis of empowerment literature in guiding the data analysis and contributing to the discussion and knowledge base on family empowerment oriented practice (Dumbrill, 2006; Dale, 2004; Wiffin, 2010; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et a., 2012; Harris, 2012; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Ivec et al., 2012). In light of the rationale of previous research for family focused child protection as a future practice need, this study has offered to approach the experiences of the families within an empowerment framework, to explore a constructive way forward as imagined by the families. A clear process was planned to conduct the study in two different phases. Phase 1 was conducted through in-depth interviewing of a small cohort of families about their experiences and aspirations with the public child protection services. A critical social theoretical framework was developed to analyse the primary data. Phase 2 of the project focused on mapping the analysed primary data against meta-synthesis of the empowerment literature. The outcome of the theoretical mapping process is reported and discussed in the relevant chapters (i.e. Chapter 6 and 7) of the study.

3.2 Research aims

As discussed in the previous chapter, the study progressed under the following aims.

1) Exploring the in-depth experiences, feelings and wishes of the families about their involvement with the public child protection services.

2) Using an empowerment lens to present the views and aspirations of the parents.

3) Building on the parents' lived experiences, the study aims to explore the scope for improving the child protection services.

3.3 Qualitative study

In context of the objectives of this research both qualitative and quantitative methods were considered. Quantitative approach offers the scope to explain phenomenon through statistically determined observation process, which is fixed, close ended and generalisable in terms of quantifiable evidences. But this method cannot explore and explain the social phenomenon, which needs deeper exploration, understanding and interpretation that cannot be done through close ended and numerical form. In comparison to this, qualitative analysis process offers the scope of in-depth exploration and interpretation of phenomenon but this cannot be statistically generalisable and largely relied on the skills, competence and rigor of the researcher.

Given the project's aims of exploring deeper and open ended human experience, a qualitative methodology has been applied in conducting the study. Qualitative research is a method that facilitates exploring the deeper meanings of a human experience and thereby generates theoretically rich observations, which are not easily reduced to numbers (Rubin and Babbie, 2008). There are two examples offered by Rubin and Babbie (2008) to illustrate this. The first example considered the concept of "defined dignity" of homeless people, a term which referred to the participants' dislike of specific types of shelter and the second documented the "fatalism" of chronically unemployed men. In both cases, qualitative enquiry did not explain the "dignity" or "fatalism" of the specific group of people in numbers or degree (i.e. in quantitative form) but articulated rich in-depth experiences and aspirations about their lifestyles (Rubin and Babbie, 2008 p. 417). These examples have reinforced the methodology adopted in this research as it also aimed to explore in-depth lived experiences and associated wishes and feelings of the families, which are open ended and cannot be analysed in quantitative form.

Qualitative research is considered a response to an emerging demand for utility and applicability in health and social care research (Finfgeld, 2003; Sandelowski, 2004). This demand has been influenced by several converging trends in health and social care research

such as the elevation of practical over theoretical knowledge, the proliferation of qualitative health research studies and the rise of evidence-based practice as a paradigm and methodology for health care (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 1366; Finfgeld, 2003). This new appreciation of qualitative research underpins of a heightened demand for research findings that are immediately or potentially relevant to practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders. The concept of qualitative research compliments the values of having a link between theory and practice, which is one of the core assumptions of critical social theory (Sandelowski, 2004). Meanwhile, this emerging demand of health and social care research in a qualitative context is quite significant, as up until the recent past there was no major interest in the findings of qualitative studies and these investigations have largely remained isolated works with little impact on health care practice.

The important advantage of qualitative research is its scope for in-depth and open-ended interaction and the potential to gain a rich understanding of the wishes, feelings and aspirations of people, particularly vulnerable groups such as the struggling and alienated families who feel that their voices are not heard or outnumbered in the quantitative domain (Sandelowski, 2004; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014). Qualitative study is accommodative in terms of the number of participants; it is generally simple and inexpensive as it requires only an audio recorder, paper, and a pen for face-to-face interviews (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Alternative approaches can be adopted when face to face interviews are not practically possible in a geographically diverse region. For example, in this study, sometimes Skype (2015) was used to interview remote participants, which saved hundreds of kilometres in travel.

In the field of health and social care research, the idea of qualitative research has emerged with a new urgency, not only due to its methodological convenience (as discussed before) but due to the demand for practical knowledge, for the need to address diverse social issues related to the lived experiences of people, and because such research can be easily implemented by frontline practitioners (Sandelowski, 2004). Sandelowski (2004, p. 1367) outlined that the emphasis on accountability and evidence-based practice has moved practical knowledge from its lowly position (with limited profile and clarity) to the top of a hierarchy of knowledge in its levels of application. The other reason for adopting a qualitative approach is the rich scope of rigorous examination and interpretation of the data, which may yield improved understandings of the quality of service, clinical outcomes and health and social care policy in general (Finfgeld, 2003).

The disadvantages linked to qualitative research are the lack of quantitative outcome, subjectivity factors, potential bias, labour intensive processes, unreliability and generalisability (Kelly, 2009; Rubin and Babbie, 2008; Finfgeld, 2003; Sandelowski, 2004). Also, qualitative

research seldom yields precise statistical statements regarding the feelings, experiences and attitudes of the study participants (Rubin and Babbie, 2008). These arguments against qualitative analysis have influenced the popularity of quantitative approaches and must be accounted for in qualitative methodologies. For example, this research has drawn on the researcher's analytical lens through his interpretation of the primary data, which progressed to further analysis and mapping against a meta-synthesis of different empowerment literature. Apart from this, the researcher has also relied on his sense of awareness regarding the boundary of his personal self, professional self as a clinical social worker and researcher, through personal reflection as well as through appropriate support of the supervision team (Simon, 1990). The researcher was mindful of potential impact of his own gender and culture in perceiving and interpreting "parenthood" and more specifically "motherhood" in light with the families' experiences with the protective services. These personal factors have been positively utilised in deeper engagement with the families to elicit their in-depth lived experiences, but have been explicitly acknowledged to avoid undue influence on the ways in which the experiences of the families have been understood and analysed.

However, in spite of the critics, qualitative approaches are increasingly recognised as an effective approach to research which goes beyond the numerical (i.e. quantitative) analysis of raw data to extract instead the deeper meaning of data through the appropriate synthesizing of qualitative findings (Kelly, 2009). The basic argument for qualitative research is its scope to go beyond instrumental reasoning and numerical interpretation of human circumstances, rather bringing philosophical perspectives in social sciences as once advocated by critical theorist Jürgen Habermas (Ngwenyama, 2002; Habermas, 1986).

3.4 Theoretical frameworks informing the research

It is always helpful when addressing a fairly complex subject like re-envisioning child protection practice embedded in family empowerment, to begin by outlining the fundamental concepts and constructs that describe and explain the phenomenon (Kelly, 2009). This can provide a comprehensive conceptual understanding of general issues such as how different societies work, how a system functions and why people engage in certain ways (Reeves, Albert, Kuper and Hodges, 2008). In this project, theory has a major place; to analyse primary data and developing themes, to analyse empowerment theories and experiments, and to further analyse and map the empowerment components from the identified themes. Different theoretical frameworks have been explored in devising a systematic process, which can integrate the research objectives, data collection, analysis and interpretation with the research topic.

3.5 Theorising the research

Theory plays a significant role in qualitative research in terms of topic identification and research design, as well as in structuring research questions. It offers different critical lenses for the researcher to look at different social circumstances, focusing their attention on different aspects of data and providing a framework within which to conduct the analysis (Reeves et al., 2008). Kelly (2009) stressed that the strength of a qualitative research study will be largely influenced by how the researcher approaches theoretical perspectives at different stages of the study. For example, in this study, social justice and anti-oppressive practice and critiques were important parts in informing the formulation of research objectives, data collection, data interpretation and discussion, in line with critical social theory. The application of theories remained very prominent when the researcher begins to identify and understand the broader intent of the project that required more complex analysis and deeper exploration of rich human experiences (Foster, 2012).

3.6 Public reasoning and valuational scrutiny

This research is about exploring the experiences of the families rather than forming judgement of their perspectives. So, the process needed a theoretical rationale that could acknowledge people to express freely about their critical experiences with public services. The rationale of exploring critical views and aspirations of the respondents with the statutory services is consistent with the public reasoning and valuational scrutiny principles (Sen, 2005). Kelly (2011) articulated Sen's work, that public reasoning has as its critical essence in the democratic values and norms of our society. Further, Sen (2005) described public reasoning and valuational scrutiny through the people's expression of their experience of the advantages and adversities of certain public services, as the prerequisite to achieving social capability. Sen (Kelly, 2011; Sen, 1999 p. X111) has taken the discussion further by introducing the concept of public reasoning and valuational scrutiny as a "vehicle for social change", a sign of capability and scope for future empowerment through improving services that matter to the public. According to Sen (1999 p. 110), public reasoning and value judgement is very important for reviewing the service and policy making in a democracy, which cannot be, "replaced by cunningly clever assumptions".

The social capability of people builds on the existence of a safe and democratic atmosphere in a society that facilitates freedom of choice and expression of critical views and judgement about resources and services, which according to Sen are essential for development. Even though it can be narrowed down in a local context, the value of public reasoning reaches

broadly into wider public spheres within and across societies (Kelly, 2011). According to Sen, social arrangements are best assessed with reference to the capabilities that people have under those arrangements, rather than in terms of welfare, happiness, or resources as available. An opportunity to participate in reasoning and valuational scrutiny of public services not only creates scope for social judgement for service improvement but is a sign of individual and collective capability (Sen, 2005). This theoretical perspective has influenced this research in exploring the experiences of the child protection service using families to build the discussion on their individual scrutiny and aspirations to form collective public reasoning. The understanding of public reasoning as a collective capability helps us to see that the demands of mutual accountability can be stringent - more stringent than they would be in a society that lacks a collective capability for public reason (Kelly, 2011).

In the safe and respectful environment of the interview, the participants were asked to articulate their reasoning and scrutiny of the services they received, which is indicative of their capability (Simon, 1990; Sen, 2005)**.** Meanwhile, the active participation of the families is observed by the researcher through their keen interest and willingness in exploring their past/ongoing experiences, feelings and wishes at length, despite complexity of the topic and interferences of difficult emotions from time to time.

3.7 Critical social theory

The theoretical framework of the study has been informed by critical theory, which analysed the experiences of the families through the lenses of critical social theory due to its empowerment focused scope for acknowledging practical experiences and knowledge of people in a critical reflective context (Ngwenyama, 2002).

Critical theory is historically articulated by political philosopher and sociologists like Karl Marx, Jürgen Habermas etc. Karl Marx developed critical theory to unmask the ideology used to falsely justify social and economic oppression as well as providing a framework to end those oppressions by empowering people to seek freedom from oppression (Koltonski, 2014). The Marxist critical perspective was further shaped by a group of sociologists at the University of Frankfurt in Germany, who referred to themselves as *The Frankfurt School*, and included Jürgen Habermas, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno (Ngwenyama, 2002). Accordingly, these social philosophers outlined that the three key components of critical theory are that it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. This means that it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actions to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation (Crossman, 2014). Habermas (1986) broadened the discourse

on critical social theory to include various strands of contemporary thoughts. In the early 1960s, he entered into the bourgeois-proletariat debate in Germany and advocated for the philosophical foundations of social science, "because of its affinity with common sense, with the knowledge which, gives us our everyday orientation, philosophy is, rather more than the sciences…" (Habermas, 1986 p.217). Habermas confronted the narrowness of 'instrumental reason' and 'the technological imperative' of modern science, which reduced political and social issues into matters of technical rationality (Ngwenyama, 2002 p.3). So, the philosophical perspective re-inforce the value of subjectivity aspects of qualitative method in building deeper understanding of human phenomenon. The historical development of critical theory in the background of oppression and misuse of power through the politics of totalitarianism and consequent sufferings of people in Europe (Habermas,1986) articulates the influence of critical approach in building subjective understanding of underlying critical voices in terms of empowerment or disempowerment. Critical theory builds the connection between subjectivity and use or misuse of power. While critical theory cannot be seen as a complete measure to the sensitivity of human sufferings, it can offer a philosophical notions and subjective discourse to highlight deeper experiences of the peripheral victims of society. Gandhi's approach to social change and development has added new perspective in critical theory concept by upholding the values of universal upliftment through raising general conscience, moral values, which can liberate the people from the pangs of hunger, exploitation and oppression (Gandhi Institution, 2017). Some of Gandhi's significant social movements were, *Sarvodaya* (Universal development), *Gram Swaraj* (Democratic de-centralisation of power) and *Satyagraha* (Insistence of truth using non-violent and non-cooperative means) against political oppression, injustice and colonisation. These social actions not only attempted to unfold oppression and injustice but offered a moral vision for a just and fair society, which can be seen as practical dimension in the values of critical theory.

In this research, critical theory is set out in building understanding about exercise of power and resources of the public child protection services from the critical perspectives, in terms of public reasoning and valuational scrutiny, of its service users. In application of the critical perspective, the key components; the practical factors, critiques and broader reflective judgement perspectives of the respondent families have been drawn on in understanding their sense of empowerment or disempowerment. The critical theory is further reinforced by the moral philosophy principle in developing a framework for undertaking the research.

3.8 Moral philosophy principle

The analysis of primary data was also guided by the moral philosophy principle in an effort to safeguard the process of data interpretation with caring values (Gray, 2010). The researcher was quite concerned about any human error such as, the researcher's personal bias or academic and professional competency factors, in doing justice to the raw data and wanted to be guided by the values of moral philosophy. The moral philosophy approach has been inspired by Kantian deontological ethics which propose that for one to act in the morally right way, one must act purely from duty (Habermas, 1986). In this study the motive and commitment remain to appropriately manage and analyse the data under a caring perspective. The Kantian deontological ethics are essentially based on reasons which predispose actions and Kant argued that it is not the consequences of actions that make them right or wrong but the motives of the person who carries out the action. There is a related commentary (Marcuse, 1968) about the connections between reasons and critiques that state reasons behind actions can be better explained via critiques. However, if critiques are driven by conscience like morality factors, they may generate reformed knowledge which Hegel considers to be essential for human freedom and prosperity (Gray, 2010). The moral philosophy principle has been a long-standing value in the social work profession (Gray, 2010) which sits well with the core social work principles of social justice, empathy, and unconditional positive regard for clients. These ethical principles reaffirm the caring values of social work. For example, under morality perspectives a social work practitioner or researcher would maintain confidentiality or undertake qualitative analysis of data with utmost sincerity and emotionally attuned commitment. While there is no doubt that the moral philosophy perspective offers emerging strength in enhancing the knowledge base of qualitative research, there will be likely risks of human factors influenced by individual developmental (i.e. cultural, ecological etc.) experiences, which may impact on the optimum utilization of moral philosophy. Gray (2010) stated that in the risk averse complex managerial practice environment it becomes difficult to maintain an ethical perspective. However, in spite of the challenges in its implementation, the moral philosophy perspective has the potential to add strength to the critical analysis of social phenomena through its caring and compassionate values (AASW, 2010).

In progressing the discussion, in this study, critical theory has been used to approach the study through practical, normative and reflective lenses in analysing the quality of child protection service experiences from the perspectives of the families involved (Reeves et al., 2008). Critical social theory not only focuses on critique, but finds alternative ways in which to improve a process that is used to improve the condition of human lives (Ngwenyama, 2002).

The critical theory informed by public reasoning and valuational scrutiny and moral philosophy principle has articulated the primary theoretical framework that had guided the research.

3.9 Guiding theoretical approaches

In the context of the theoretical approaches, the following working components as developed by the author, have inspired the shaping of the theoretical base of the project. An in house theoretical framework is particularly important in conducting an exploratory study (Kelly, 2009). The following theoretical assumptions have guided the research project.

a) Critical reflections of the service users can inform the quality of service impact and suggest pathways to improve service. This theoretical perspective has influenced the formulation of the research objectives, data collection and its analysis and discussion.

b) Anti-oppressive practice can allow people the freedom to critically apprise the quality of service they (practically) experienced. This theoretical assumption has informed structuring of the interview prompts and the analysis of the primary data. The anti-oppressive approach consciously challenges and questions the status quo or the norms of an organisation to find any systemic inequalities and oppression (Wong & Yee, 2010).

Mullaly (2010, p. 40) outlines oppression in the following way:

> What determines oppression is when a person is blocked from opportunities for self-development, is excluded from the full participation in society, does not have certain rights that the dominant group takes for granted, or is assigned a second-class citizenship, not because of individual talent, merit, or failure, but because of his or her membership of a particular group or category of people.

c) Public reasoning and critiques of human services go hand in hand and can inform the quality of impact of service (Sen, 2005). When critical social theory is complimented by moral philosophy principles, it exerts additional strength not only in its balancing applications but it also allows more accountability on the part of the researcher in enhancing the scope of qualitative analysis.

In undertaking this study, the researcher explored the theoretical frameworks to meet the methodological demands like data analysis, devising themes from primary data and meta-synthesis of empowerment theories to develop tool for mapping of primary data.

Phase 1: Application of theoretical frameworks in data collection and processing

The theoretical framework as built on critical theory amidst public reasoning and valuational scrutiny and moral philosophy principles has offered a structure in planning and organising data collection and processing. The public reasoning and valuational scrutiny principle of Sen (1999, 2005) has set the scene for collecting primary data from public domain regarding the respondent families' critical experiences of the public child protection services. The collected data is then thematically analysed under critical theory principles of Habermas (1986; Ngwenyama, 2002) in the realm of the respondents' practical experiences, critiques and reflective judgement, and the entire process (interviewing and analysis of data) was managed under the caring values of the moral philosophy principle (Gray, 2010).

The theoretical framework has set a structure in addressing specific weakness of qualitative research in terms of its over reliance on a researcher's conceptions, interpretations and translations in the context of humanistic limitations and its impact on the research outcome (Sandelowski, 2004). The core concept of long-term vision and family empowerment has been qualitatively explored in three stages: primarily from the experience and experiential scrutiny and reasoning of the participating families; secondly, through qualitative analysis under critical social theory; and finally, through reinforcing the values of caring and accountability guided by moral philosophy principles.

Thematic analysis

Themes are the significant components of data, which are visible and can be manifested in different forms like image, sounds and objects as expressions of the broad perspectives in the process of qualitative analysis (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). This data analysis concept has been used in this research in devising and highlighting specific patterns in the data as indicative of the lived experiences of the families relevant to the objectives of the study. This approach is adopted following initial analysis of primary data which although analysed the data but the process needed identifying and discussing social phenomenon under specified pattern like themes and then broader themes. This process also served the purpose of undertaking theoretical mapping of the analysed data. The process of thematic analysis involved reading and re-reading of the data in building familiarity to identify significant broader patterns of meaning and potential themes and then reviewing the themes and subthemes against the

dataset in clarifying the relevance with the objectives and theme heading (University of Auckland, 2016). The challenge involved this process was the writing part, weaving together the analytical narratives and data extract, which relied on the researcher's personal skills and values in translating the significance of the data. This thematic analysis process also offered the framework in collating the themes for the purpose of theoretical mapping against empowerment framework as well as undertaking discussion on the findings in context of existing literature.

Phase 2: Application of synthesised empowerment lens

In phase 2 of the data analysis, the processed primary data was analysed and mapped out against a meta-synthesis of empowerment literature, which later developed integrated construct of empowerment theory model/lens (Figure 2). In the analysis of the diverse empowerment approaches, the meta-synthesis process was utilised because of its application as a technique of qualitative data analysis (Sandelowski, 2004). Also, because of its applicability as an intentional and coherent approach, which can synthesise a collective body of qualitative or ethnographic work to identify common themes and/or to contrast different groups of approaches on a common topic (i.e. empowerment) and provide deeper insights of a social phenomenon (Erwin, Brotherson and Summers, 2011). As a strategy of qualitative research and analysis it offers a multidimensional interpretation approach in exploring the data from a diverse professional perspective with researchers from a range of disciplines (Erwin et al., 2011). It brings together and drills down the research findings of individual studies, to examine them and discover the essential features and attempts to combine these individual phenomena into a transformed understanding (Walsh and Downe, 2005; Schreiber, Crooks and Stern, 1997).

The goal of the meta-synthesis is to produce new and integrative interpretations of findings that are more substantive than those resulting from quantitative exploration. A meta-synthesis approach can help provide a qualitative delineation of the findings. This research project has utilised the qualitative meta-synthesis technique in exploring empowerment theories and practical welfare experiments from a range of disciplines like humanities and social sciences, developmental economics, human rights etc. in building a comprehensive framework or lens for empowerment focus mapping and interpretation. Meanwhile, the process of gathering earlier literature started in the stage of conceiving the research idea (as discussed in Chapter 1) when the author, in his professional capacity, was trying to approach and make sense of the difficult experiences of some families in context of empowerment perspectives.

In approaching this research, a qualitative in depth interview method is applied due to its scope for deeper exploration by listening and watching targeted population (Rubin and Babbie, 2008). This approach sits well with the objectives of this study to explore experiences of a cohort without any specific set of questions but in orderly manner (Rubbin and Babbie, 2008 p. 441). The rationale behind this approach is that, this qualitative interview method allowed the researcher to engage with the cohort of families to explore their experiences in the specific context with a list of interview prompt in order of occurrences (i.e. beginning, mid and end stage). However, this order and the process were flexible and largely progressed at the pace of the participants by providing them an empathetic and safe space. The data collection process and later the analysis process were guided by the critical theory, comprising of public reasoning and valuational scrutiny (Sen, 1999; 2005), which allowed for critical reflection of the participants about their service experiences (Habermas,1986; Ngwenyama, 2002). In the later stage (Chapter 4), an empowerment lens was developed, guided by the meta-synthesis of empowerment approaches, to theoretically map the analysed primary data to understand the experiences of the participants in an empowerment framework. The theoretical applications, comprising of critical theory, public reasoning and moral philosophy principles have offered nuanced structural understanding in building a framework for analysing the primary data. However, as Sandelowski (2004) pointed out, the subjective element of qualitative analysis is much deeper and the proposed data analysis structure, cannot automatically overcome their own limitations.

3.10 Recruitment and data collection

The recruitment and data collection process was carefully planned based on the aims of the project and also with the hope to recruit a maximum number of participants. As previously discussed, the study was conducted in Queensland, Australia, where public child protection services are presently called the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services which undertakes investigations and assessments. The statutory decisions affect the lives of the parents and children involved in the intervention process (DOH, 2000; Forrester, 2008).

The recruitment process of the families commenced with different forms of notifications in the community, including the displaying of pamphlets on key notice boards at a variety of agencies such as local hospital, a health and wellbeing centre, community based NGOs working in family and parent support, indigenous community housing support centres. There was also circulation of emails through chief functionaries of different community development services with details of the proposed research project and an invitation to voluntarily submit an

expression of interest to participate. The initial plan was to interview seven families under the assumption that several family members living in the house would participate in the interview process. But, in the initial stage of the interview process, it was observed that most of the families who expressed an interest in participating were single parents with no children. In some cases, where there were children at home, the parents appeared hesitant to allow the children to take part in the interview, or the children themselves were reluctant to participate, as reported by their parents. After due consultation with the supervision team, the researcher applied to the ethics committee for an extension of six months to facilitate recruiting more participants. However, despite adopting different recruitment strategies with a diversified advertising campaign these did not yield a great result with only 10 families in total being recruited.

A snowball sampling method (Rubin and Babbie, 2008; Ivec et al., 2012) was adopted in the recruitment process. Although this is a conventional process of data collection and has resulted in a skewed sample, it has its own limitation (Ivec et al., 2012). The limitations will be discussed further. It is important to note that the use of a snowballing technique to attract participants, who are mostly members of a local community based family support organisation, may draw the criticism that the sample is biased toward those with an unhappy history with authorities and who want to share it (Ivec et al., 2012). However, in the absence of cross comparison, it is difficult to ascertain whether this is the case or not. Even if it is assumed that the sample is biased in this way, the views of these participants do matter. If it is assumed that those interviewed for this study are among the most complex families, understanding more fully their sources of grievance does matter and may provide new insight into how to effectively engage with such families in the future (Ivec et al., 2012; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014).

In the recruitment process, the key criterion was the family's involvement with the public child protection services. No other specific criteria, in terms of the time frame of involvement or nature of involvement, were applied in the recruitment process. A democratic process was adopted under which the participants were recruited irrespective of their socio-cultural affiliation, ethnicity, educational qualification, economic status, religion, gender, sexual orientation or national origin. The plan for interviews took into consideration the date, time, location and media (face to face/telephone/skype) including the practical and cultural needs of the participants. The interview was conducted in a qualitative in-depth interview process with the help of semi-structured interview prompts (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014).

<u>Interview process</u>

Given the sensitive nature of this area of research, a qualitative interview method was considered due to its scope for a generic plan of enquiry without any specific set of questions; instead, interview prompts in a certain sequence were used to facilitate an open-ended response process (Rubin and Babbie, 2008). In contrast, the qualitative general interview process provided the flexibility to rephrase questions/interview prompts as the interview evoked emotional presentation of the family members. This interview process allowed for a comfortable pace and enabled the researcher, as the interviewer, to act as an explorer to enter deeper into the story and like a traveller to explore the different domains of the story and navigate freely through consistent, open and respectful communications (Kvale, 1996**).** Furthermore, the researcher approached the interviewees as someone who was genuinely interested to know about their story and this naive perspective helped to connect with the families and to smoothly facilitate the interview process (Kvale, 1996**).**

3.11 Demographic status of the participants

Age	Gender	Education	Employment status	Religious background	Cultural background as described by the participants	Geographical locations
61	Female	Bachelor of Education	Relief Teacher	Anglican	"Australian Caucasian"	Rural North Queensland
38	Male	Diploma of Engineering	Part time Employed	Anglican	Not Stated	Rural North Queensland
39	Female	Grade 10, Diploma in Community Services	Community Services (Volunteer)	Jehovah Witness	"Yugoslavian"	Rural North Queensland
9	Female	Grade 5	Student	Jehovah Witness	"Yugoslavian"	Rural North Queensland
27	Female	Grade 11, Motor Mechanic. Hospitality Management	Hospitality & House Keeping	Anglican	"White"	Rural North Queensland
42	Male	(Not stated). "Trade"	Unemployed	Not Stated	"Australian"	Rural North Queensland
51	Male	Grade 10	Disability pensioner	Christian	"First generation Australian"	Rural North Queensland
67	Male	BA, MA, Diploma in Teaching	Retired	Quaker	"Australian"	Rural North Queensland
36	Female	Grade 7(Special Education). Food handing certificate	Unemployed	Christian	"White"	Rural North Queensland
38	Female	Grade11	Laundry service	No Religion	"White Australian"	Rural North Queensland
31	Female	Grade 11	Unemployed	Catholic	"Australian"	Rural North Queensland

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

As outlined in the demographic profiles table, the participants were from a range of backgrounds in terms of age, education, gender, sense of cultural affiliation and religion but from similar geographical location. The participants have described their cultural and religious status alongside other demographic status as per their choice and opinion. The youngest participant was nine years old, the oldest was 67, and the mean age was 40. The reason behind only one child participant in the list of participants, is that only one child agreed to participate in the interview and her parent eventually allowed her. As discussed before, the researcher offered to interview the children of all the participating parents who had child/children at home with experiences with the public child protection services. However, three parents politely declined, citing that their children did not like to participate; one parent's child was in the infancy stage and the rest of the parents had no children in their care.

In terms of gender profile, 7 of the participants were female and 4 were male. All the participants described themselves as literate, ranging from grade 5 to postgraduate qualifications. A number of participants also talked about their own difficult developmental experiences and attributed their parenting support needs to this (and the lack of good parental role models in their own lives). In fact, 6 of the parents reported experiencing childhood trauma in the form of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglectful care and/or living in the foster care system. In terms of geographical location, the participants hailed from from Rural North Queensland regions including rural remote areas. However, during interviewing time two respondents participated from their South East Queensland locations as per their convenience.

Given the qualitative exploratory methods of the research project, no structured questionnaire was developed. However, a list of interview prompts (enclosed in the Appendices 1) was prepared as per the research objectives. The interview prompts were drawn on the research core concept, aims and under the values of critical social theory. In construction of the interview prompts, the researcher was mindful of creating a conducive atmosphere in guiding the in-depth interview process (Rubin & Babbie, 2008) with a reasonable sequence of early stage, middle stage and end or ongoing stages. It is important to mention here that at times the chronology of the interview process had progressed at the pace of the participants but, in general, it helped to remain focused. The interview prompts were guided by the aims of the study to generate in-depth exploration on practical experience, feelings and wishes of the families.

In the process of interviewing, the entire engagement with each of the participants was managed with appropriate confidentiality within a sensitive and supportive environment. The child participant was interviewed (as per her choice) under the supervision of her parent at their living room, and in a developmentally appropriate way with respect and sensitivity, to

make her feel safe and comfortable to engage in the process. A pre-interview discussion was undertaken with each family regarding the process of the interview and to ensure that the process would be as convenient for them as possible. At each face-to-face interview, a light snacks packet was taken for the family and after the interview a thank you letter, along with a supermarket voucher, was sent to each participant as a token of appreciation for the time they contributed to the research project. Meanwhile, the voucher was never a precondition for participation rather a humanistic gesture. Participation was voluntary. It was about respecting their precious time and invaluable input in this research. Entire process was guided by the supervision team.

The families were provided with phone numbers of appropriate helplines in case they needed counselling support during the course of the interviews because of any issues like emotional impact of revisiting past experiences or new disclosure of past trauma etc. The support plans were discussed and planned with the recruited participants prior to the interviews.

The interviews were planned based on the convenience of both the researcher and the participating families. The interviews were conducted mostly face to face at the participant's home (n=8) and some interviews (n=3) were conducted remotely via Skype due to distance issues and the convenience for both parties (interviewees and the researcher). For the Skype based interviews, the day before the actual interview, the researcher connected with the participants via Skype to familiarise the participants with the electronic communication process and then the actual interviews were planned based on the convenience of the participants. The participants were generally attuned with the skype media once connections were established with an audio and/or visual process. They did not raise any concerns in terms of communications but rather appeared relaxed while conducting the interview from their personal spaces.

At the commencement of the interview, the whole process was explained to the participants; particularly orienting them about the interview prompts (the nature of points to be explored, stages and the flow of the interview). Then the research objectives were explained along with the purpose and expectations from the interview. The participants were informed about the process regarding general confidentiality, data storage procedures, and they were also encouraged to ask any questions without any hesitation about any aspects of the project or the interview. The respondents then had the option to sign the agreement prepared for them or decline to participate. The consent forms were approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University and the documents contained relevant information for the participants. The consent forms are attached as appendices 2 and 3.

In the course of the interview process, optimum consideration was given to the participants' convenience regarding the meeting time, place, language spoken etc. For example, based on the preference of some participants the researcher interviewed them at their home or outside their home. The participants who engaged via Skype had the opportunity to remain in their intimate personal space (i.e. bedroom, personal sofa) and thus appeared to be quite comfortable during the interview. The researcher was also mindful of communication factors due to differences in his English language pronunciation and the local Australian spoken English phonetics. This was discussed clearly with verbal reassurance and agreement that each party would ask the other party to repeat anything that they did not understand.

The views of the families were captured through written notes and audio recordings, which were later transcribed in verbatim as well as in written form for qualitative analysis. Transcripts from the interviews were subject to in-depth analysis to explore and explain in detail certain issues and phenomena in relation to the families' experience, and scope for empowering the families and for improving the child protection services.

3.12 Analysis of primary data

The views of the families recorded through electronic audio devices and written notes were later transcribed and kept separately in printed form for analysis. The data from the interviews were thematically analysed in context of the critical theory framework, comprising of public reasoning and valuational scrutiny and moral philosophy principle to explore the families' perceptions about the nature of child protection services offered and the impact on their sense of empowerment or disempowerment and the scope for improving the child protection services.

The transcribed interview from each participant was divided as per the order of the interview prompts (n=12). For example, the families' experience of being consulted/not consulted about child protection concerns and organising a safety plan in the pre-intervention stage, under this prompt the transcribed raw data of responses from all ten families were recorded and then each individual response was analysed and managed in terms of the critical theoretical framework. The analysis process acknowledged the participants' reasoning and scrutiny of the services (Sen, 2005) they experienced. The analysis process of the data of all the participants progressed in the same manner as the experiences of the child participant, although the child participant was interviewed with adequate sensitivity in a developmentally appropriate way (as mentioned earlier). Then the data was analysed through the critical social theoretical components like practical experiences, reflective judgement and critics (Ngwenyama, 2002). The process was repeated for each of the 12 interview prompts and then

a broad analysis was drawn to articulate parents' experiences and aspirations. The discussion also identified congruent comments drawing on the accounts of the participants for a broader consensus in their comments via key words and concepts.

In the course of the analysis, the data was divided, examined, conceived, imagined and synthesized (Paterson, Claire-Jehanne, Chevrier, Ashe, King and Moldoveanu, 2009; Sandelowski, 2004) in the context of critical social theory (Ngwenyama, 2002; Reeves et al., 2008) and moral philosophy – and not by the demand of judgment or diagnosis like instrumental reasoning (Ngwenyama, 2002). Procedural justice based assessment has been a problem in the conventional child protection practice framework as outlined in the families' perspectives (Dumbrill, 2006; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Wiffin, 2010; Ivec et al., 2012). The experiences (i.e. primary data) of the families have been treated with high regard as the unique fundamental voice and an account of public reasoning and scrutiny of the statutory services. The data was processed using a non-judgmental and no incorrect or correct approach. It is important to note, even though the participants were critical on their reflection about their experiences with the public child protection services, the research was not about judging the role of child protection services based on contents of the gathered primary data. The researcher followed the experiences from families' perspective and tried to explore their presented sense of wellbeing, thoughts and aspiration in context of qualitative enquiry.

3.13 Ethical considerations

In the course of the data analysis, the researcher observed that he was directed by an inner sense of accountability to go the extra mile in extracting the deeper meaning from the richness of the families' experiences. Professional research ethics holds the researcher responsible to appropriately comprehend, use and contribute to the research (Rubin & Babbie, 2008 p.10). The researcher felt morally responsible to appropriately and fairly translate the thoughts and aspirations of the families (Gray, 2010). This also raises the question regarding limits of optimum human utility as critics in response to the ethical factors. However, this unconditional positive regards, as also noted in Carl Roger's humanistic psychology (Holosko, Skinner and Robinson, 2008), has directed a carefully theorised research project through the critical theoretical framework, consisting of public reasoning and valuation scrutiny, critical social theory and moral philosophy principles. Apart from the two critical factors of the framework, the moral philosophy principles have created new opportunities in privileging it from the caring values of the social work profession (Houston, 2009). Gray (2010) described the moral philosophy principle as an emergent ethical theory in social work. Gray (2010) referred to Kantian deontological ethics as being grounded in the respectful treatment of human because

they are rational, moral agents whose thoughts, feelings and aspirations count. The earlier discussion on the subjectivity factor in a qualitative enquiry approach (Rubin & Babbie, 2008) also needs to be acknowledged if it still can be seen as a weakness in comparison to quantitative discussion and how to address such an issue in future work. Although, Bunting et al. (2015 p.2) do not see any weakness in the subjectivity factors, rather presented it as the "human tradition of creating subjective reality", and this is important for the researchers and professionals to understand it if they are to work in an empathetic environment and family centred way.

The other ethical issues faced occurred in the course of witnessing the parents revisiting their difficult past for the purpose of the research. Although the parents did voluntarily participate in the interviews and appropriate counselling arrangements were made to deal with any emotional after-effects, a sense of moral accountability during and after the interviews was experienced. In this context, the researcher was also frequently challenged by the tension between his practitioner profile (as a clinical social worker) and as a researcher in the background of participants' difficult social and emotional circumstances. In the course of the research, the tragic death of a parent and the emotionally draining stories of the families were difficult to absorb as a human being but as a student researcher the journey was empowering. The broader ethical issues were managed through the researcher's own reflections and a sense of wisdom and reflexivity (regarding wider objectives) as well as through regular support from the supervision team.

This ethical accountability factor was positively utilized through the researcher being extra caring and in managing the data with extra attentiveness as discussed before. Another ethical issue may be considered as the manner of acknowledging the contribution of the participants. Even though participation in the research was voluntary, however, to acknowledge the families' time in this study, with their due permission, they were sent supermarket vouchers, as a token of appreciation. These critical issues were regularly discussed with the supervisors and managed accordingly.

The work was limited to data gathered from only 11 participants in 10 families (n=10) which potentially restricted the scope for a more comfortable exploration of the area. The difficulty in recruiting participants, under the open recruitment process, occurred in spite of careful planning and extensive public notification for expressions of interest. The project's inability to recruit any indigenous family is also remarkable in terms of the indigenous population demographic involved with the public child protection services in Queensland (AIHW, 2015). This proportional inconsistency in the cohort draws ethical question, which needs critical exploration of factors responsible for their alienations. However, this lack of participation by families who have been involved with child protection services reflects a scope for more

research to understand different factors that contributed to the nature of their level of motivation and sense of integration with the mainstream systems in society. Recruitment issue in this specific area does not appear to be unknown. The researcher also noted that most of the previous research projects (Dale 2004; Dumbrill 2006; Harris 2012; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Johnson and Sullivan 2008; Platt 2008) have all gone through a structured process and have approached the families through the data base of the local public child protection services following appropriate permission. These projects were able to recruit an average number of 26.84 participants[7]. It is further noted that one recently funded Australian research project (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014) after failing to secure such permission from the local public child protection services went through an open recruitment process and were able to recruit only 9 participants through the snowball sampling process. What is emerging here is that unlike open community based recruitment drives, the structured process supported by the statutory child protection services carries potential for recruiting more participants. It appears important to explore if there is any differential response and impact factors due to the nature of the recruitment drive via structured (supported by the system) or non-structured (open recruitment drive) means in light of broader ethical implications.

However, the difficulties in this project's open recruitment drive may be assumed as the families' sense of hesitation, resistance and difficulty to revisit a painful past. It is also important to think beyond the assumed obstacles in the data gathering process to grasp the deeper meaning of the hesitation of families in terms of a sense of distrust and alienation and whether this replicates the families' apparent difficulties in engaging with the child protection professionals. In spite of the limitations in the sample size, the project did build on the experiences of 10 families and provided a number of different perspectives from a range of angles. Even though the individual circumstances of the families were variable, significant congruity on several areas was noted in the data.

In terms of protecting privacy of the participant families, the collected data would be managed as per the James Cook University policy, which requires that all digital research data be backed-up securely on the HPRC (High-Performance and Research Computing). This is the recommended storage solution for data management at JCU as it offers a safe and secure way to store the research data. This process will be followed after submission of the final thesis.

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[7] The researcher made this calculation based on the number of participants of each of the project as explored: Dale (2004) 18, Dumbrill (2006) 18, Harris (2012) 40, Ghaffar et. al. (2012) 42, Johnson and Sullivan (2008) 20 and Platt (2008) 23.

The author also acknowledges the scope of wider extensive discussion from different other global socio-religious perspectives to approach the discussion on family. However, in the limited space of this research, the author built it from his own anecdotal experiences with two such perspectives and the limitations are already acknowledged in Chapter 2.

3.14 Researching sensitive topics

One of the major challenges of approaching the project was interviewing and dealing with the participant families with utmost sensitivity and care, in relation to their emotionally draining past and ongoing experiences. It was also about the researcher's wellbeing and continuing to serve the purpose, which was directly linked to the accountability of keeping everybody physically and emotionally safe. Academic literature has approached any sensitive research topic with a high degree of caution by outlining diverse psychological and emotional distress, socio-cultural and physical factors (i.e. safety from germs/disease and physical safety/personal threat during the home visit) associated with the research process (Bahn and Wetherill, 2012; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong, 2009). Given the sensitive nature of the research topic involving potential emotional outburst and social stigma (Bahn and Wetherill, 2012), the researcher approached the data collection and management process in terms of duty of care for the participant families and self-care for himself (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). While the researcher, in consultation with his advisory team, made careful planning in pre-organising appropriate counselling support for the participants, he managed the potential emotional impact through his sense of wisdom including personal reflections as well as with support from the advisory team. In this regard, apart from previous communications in the planning stage, the researcher also contacted the respondent family members on the day, prior to the interview, to discuss mutual convenience (i.e. general wellbeing on the day, if any changes were needed on time, venue etc.) and to ascertain generic safety in the environment. In relation to convenience and safety check, he always carried his mobile phone having saved numbers of psychological counsellors as organised, and also phone numbers of other essential services including the University functionaries for appropriate consultations necessary. The researcher was sensitive to participants' cultural diversity, their lifestyle as well as acknowledging their social and emotional circumstances. For example, the author was sensitive and tolerant while faced with situations when participants intermittently used swear words as well as smoking in the room (may be as a distraction while revisiting challenging experiences) by opening the window on polite request.

It is important to mention here that undertaking interviews through home visit alone, even though all went smoothly with the author, may need reviewing in light of risk management. This introspection is necessary to ascertain whether future researchers need to be accompanied by a support person, and also setting out a prior checklist for appropriate support and protection plans both for the participants as well as the researchers (Bahn and Wetherill, 2012).

3.15 Conclusion

The organisation of the methodology had to accommodate and address a number of aspects. The primary challenges were to apply theory and method rigorously and the rigor lies in devising a systematic method whose assumptions are congruent with the core concept of the research project (Reicher and Taylor 2005). In the process of accommodating multiple demands, the project has adopted a working theoretical approach from a mix of public reasoning, critical social theory and moral philosophy to collect, analyse, interpret and discuss the sensitive human data under the safeguard of reasoning, reflective judgement, critiques and accountability. The theoretical construct/model of empowerment as developed through meta-synthesis of empowerment theories has been utilised in mapping the analysed primary data. The concept of qualitative research appears to give recognition to the humanistic utility of analysing complex social data without instrumental application or the adopting of technological imperatives as aspired by critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas (Ngwenyama, 2002; Habermas, 1986). Sandelowski (2004, p. 1366) described qualitative research as an "elevation of practical knowledge over basic knowledge", which can produce findings that can be immediately or potentially relevant for use in practice by the frontline professionals. The researcher attempted to structure and manage the data under the adopted theoretical framework in the context of his knowledge, skills, values, talent and aptitude, and the process was informed by the objectives of the study. While the author enjoyed the whole process, starting from planning for data collection through to interpreting and managing the raw data under moral philosophy principles, human error which may potentially affect the interpretation has remained a concern (Sandelowski, 2004). As a clinical social worker, the researcher was mindful about his practitioner as well as an academic researcher profile, and own developmental experiences and the consequent blind spot factors as per Freudian psychology (Duthiers, 2005). The researcher received regular supervision support. In relation to the human utility factor, Sandelowski (2004, p. 1366) stated that management of the data is largely

influenced by how the findings are conceived, presented, synthesised, signified and translated, and the complex repertoire of skills required to activate the knowledge transformation cycle. The call for skill requirement in undertaking qualitative enquiry may need due attention and perhaps appropriate clarity in minimising the human error issue and better preparing future researchers. However, despite the possibility of human error, an exploratory approach under critical theory framework amidst moral philosophy based accountability can still guide the science of qualitative research (Gray, 2010). There has been an increasing plea in the social work profession to bring back a moral philosophy principle. In the current changing world scenario when technology, industry and competition have redefined human development due to overwhelming impact of instrumental interpretations (Habermas, 1986; Ngwenyama, 2002), this research attempted to understand if qualitative research under critiques, public reasoning and moral principles can provide integral perspective in conceptualising human phenomena. In the context of room for broader application, the critical theoretical framework has potential for utilisation in assessing public services in similar contexts such as disability, mental health and substance misuse management.

The next chapter will focus on meta-synthesis of empowerment approaches in continuation of building the methodology of the study.

Chapter 4: Meta-synthesis of empowerment theories

This chapter starts by outlining the theoretical aspect of the meta-synthesis technique as a method of data analysis in a qualitative study. A major part of the chapter elucidates different empowerment approaches from a wide range of disciplines like social science, psychology, education, humanity, economics and human development, to generate a broader discussion on concepts, process and pathways of empowerment. The empowerment approaches also include three social empowerment experiments undertaken internationally. The chapter then focusses on an application of the meta-synthesis process to the theoretical approaches including the social experiments to structure a theoretical construct or model of empowerment. The emerging theoretical lens (i.e. integrated construct of empowerment theories - ICET) (Figure 2) has been later applied in chapter 6 for the purpose of analysis and mapping of the primary data.

4.1 Meta-synthesis: A technique of qualitative analysis of data

As discussed in (Methodology) Chapter 3 regarding the rationale of utilising the meta-synthesis approach, here is an illustration regarding the uniqueness of meta-synthesis in qualitative analysis. The methods of synthesising the findings of qualitative study (i.e. meta-synthesis) was not well established compared to methods of synthesis relevant to quantitative study (i.e. meta-analysis). This is now changing, and with the increasing recognition of qualitative research, the demand of appropriate methodology for synthesising qualitative studies has escalated (Britten, Campbell, Pope and Donovan, 2002). The challenge lies around building methodology for searching qualitative work as there are no specific criteria for judging the quality of a published work. Similarly, there are no standard methods for conducting syntheses of qualitative research and, given the contested nature of qualitative analysis, the outcome of meta-syntheses does not necessarily get universal endorsement (Britten et al., 2002). In spite of the methodological challenges, meta synthesis has been gaining acknowledgement and increasingly going beyond both the systematic and narrative literature review. It is also offering some degree of conceptual innovation (Strike and Posner, 1983) through induction and interpretations via the comparisons of different studies (Britten et al., 2002). Erwin, Brotherson and Summers (2011) outline meta-synthesis as an intentional

and coherent approach of data analysis in qualitative research, which can synthesise a collective body of qualitative or ethnographic research to identify common themes and/or to contrast different groups of approaches on a common topic; for example, a topic like empowerment (Sandelowski, 2004). An advantage of qualitative meta-synthesis is that it does not solely focus on what practice or interventions are working or not working but rather it can help us understand the depth of dimensions in the process of improving service effectiveness (Erwin, et al, 2011; Major and Savin-Baden, 2010). In this study, the meta-synthesis approach is utilised for interpretive purposes rather than aggregating intent, as opposed to meta-analysis in quantitative studies (Walsh and Downe, 2005). This technique of qualitative research does not go by any specific stereotype of process or norms. In the past, there was an attempt to develop formulistic pathways for data analysis. Paterson, Thorne, Canam and Jillings (2001) had attempted to articulate formulistic guidance in conducting meta-synthesis research but later they recognised that meta-synthesis research can be only partially defined by its procedural steps. The reason for the limited scope of a formulistic process is because its nature is determined to a considerable extent by the people in the research group, their relationships and understanding, or individual researcher's knowledge, skills, values and aptitudes which all essentially illustrate that this research method is evolving, relational and creative (Paterson et al., 2009; Sandelowski, 2004). The creative scope of meta-synthesis has set the rationale for its application in the synthesis of empowerment theories to build a consolidated component. In this meta-synthesis process, the empowerment approaches were subjected to comparison with one another amidst reciprocal translations in the line of arguments they represent (Britten et al., 2002). Noblit and Hare (1988)'s seven steps synthesis approach was followed as a guide for undertaking meta-synthesis of the empowerment approaches (Britten et al., 2002).

The conceptual frameworks of empowerment theories from different interrelated social, economic and humanistic disciplines were carefully examined within the specific context of the approaches before combining the theoretical phenomenon into a transformed whole as per the objective of the study (Walsh and Downe, 2005). The basic goal of the meta-synthesis of the multiple empowerment theories and experimental applications was to generate new knowledge about the theoretical process of empowerment, informed by the phenomenon already highlighted (Paterson et al., 2009). The meta-synthesis process was also determined by the future goal of developing a tool for mapping the empowerment elements in the primary data of the research (Erwin et al., 2011).

Criticisms of the validity of meta-synthesis revolve around the issue of discerning or measuring the quality of qualitative data analysis and also credibility or trustworthiness (Erwin et al., 2011) of the identified findings as opposed to aggregated outcomes of quantitative analysis. The

qualitative meta-synthesis emerged over 40 years ago, in the 1970's as an important development in research (Sandelowski, Barroso and Voils, 2007). However, there are significant differences in the theoretical perspectives (e.g. interpretivism, symbolic interactionism, critical theory, feminism and post modernism) and methodologies (e.g., between case studies, grounded theory studies, critical ethnographies) (Crotty, 1998; Erwin et al., 2011). Similarly, diverse strands of qualitative research are influenced by different disciplines and different epistemological assumptions (Prasad, 2005; Erwin et al., 2011). Drawing on Prasad (2005), evidence based practice in qualitative meta-synthesis can be viewed through a broader contextual and socio-culturally rich lens (Erwin et al, 2011). Researchers can use a number of structured strategies to address credibility and trustworthiness such as triangulation, in an effort to measure and map out the findings, member checks, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing as well as systemic data collection and analysis (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach and Richardson, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Erwin et al., 2011).

As a working definition, meta-synthesis is a systematic process, which facilitates rich and multidimensional analyses of a range of interrelated data (i.e. theories, approaches and frameworks) on a common agenda, in an effort to integrate and structure common themes, which is an essential component of evidence based practice (Buysse, Wesley, Snyder and Winton, 2006). However, it is important to acknowledge the challenges of synthesis in qualitative research due to the nature and source of assumptions inherent in the process (Chenail, 2009). Sandelowski et al. (2007) have also acknowledged the diversity issue, but simultaneously stressed that meta-synthesis can preserve integrity and the quality of qualitative research outcome. In this chapter, the meta-synthesis process will approach different concepts and frameworks under the common agenda of empowerment for building a consolidated theoretical model/lens of empowerment. The purpose of the model or lens will be to analyse the primary data in mapping out empowerment components and processes as outlined by the participant families in the research.

4.2 Data source

As discussed in the methodology, the articles on empowerment have been gathered not only from electronic data sources of the James Cook University library but from published books, which are not available through computerised search engines (Britten et al., 2002). The search terms like *Empowerment* or *Human empowerment*, *Development*, *Qualitative studies* were used. The data was mainly drawn from the English language journals or websites due to the convenience on gathering literature on computerised conventional search engines generally

presents literature in English, which is the required official language of the James Cook University, and this is also the language the author is comfortable to read and write.

4.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Articles were excluded if they were not relevant to the topic; a numerical interpretation based quantitative study; an article which is based on undemocratic political motivations not consistent with anti-oppressive practice (AASW, 2010); or an article/research paper which is not about human empowerment or development (Cairns & Murray, 2015).

Articles were included if they: were published in books or peer reviewed journals or relevant websites like "Gandhi Research Foundation", a nationally recognised organisation in India; which were published in the English language; and reflected on process and approaches on human empowerment including empirical literature like case studies, reviews and discussion on theories. In terms of search outcome followed by several screening and exclusion checks, 19 literatures were sourced, which represented 13 different empowerment approaches including 3 practical applications based studies. The researcher had undertaken the literature search process before the PhD study and it has remained an ongoing process in the course of building the chapter through several drafting and re-drafting processes (Cairns and Murray, 2015).

Analysis of data

Noblit and Hare's (1988) seven step approach for conducting a meta-synthesis was followed in starting the analysis process:

Box 1 Seven meta-synthesis steps of Noblit and Hare (1988)
i.   Getting started
ii.   Looking at the interest and relevant areas
iii. Reading the approaches
iv.   Identifying the relationship of the approaches
v.   Translating into one another
vi.   Synthesizing translations
vii. Articulating the synthesis

4.4 Analysis of theoretical concepts and frameworks of empowerment

This section of the chapter analyses the diverse concepts and framework of empowerment guided by the first three steps in Box 1 i. Getting started, ii. Looking at the interest and relevant areas, iii. Reading the approaches (Noblit and Hare, 1988) which all aimed to build a wider discussion on the multi-disciplinary process of human empowerment. The approaches of the authors were thoroughly read and in this process the key themes, metaphors and concepts within the findings, discussions and conclusions sections were noted (Cairns & Murray, 2015).

Meanwhile, the generic concept of empowerment has been discussed in chapter 1, to present conceptual assumptions of empowerment in this study, which can be seen and witnessed by the service users through their practical experiences. These have also influenced the analysis of the empowerment approaches.

The Box number 2 presents the literature details, their sources, key interest area in the topic and the initial themes as noted for exploration and synthesis.

Box 2			
Author|s	Interest area in topic	Publication source	Identified initial themes for exploration
Lee (1996)	Empowerment in social work practice	Book chapter	Social rights
Sen (1999;2005)	Social capability as freedom	Journal articles and Book	Social capability
Lee (1996)	Empowerment in social work practice	Book chapter	Social Justice
Simon (1990)	Rethinking empowerment	Journal article	Human reflexivity
Page and Chzuba (1999)	Empowerment: What is it?	Journal article	Empowerment as power
Freire (1970)	Human behaviour in environment	Book	Pedagogy approach
Pernell (1986)	Empowerment and social group work	Book chapter	Group work and solidarity
Gandhi Research Foundation (2015)	Gandhian concept of development	Website	Universal development
Haque (1989)	Human development report	UNDP website	Human development
Speer and Paterson (2000)	Development instrument	Website	Psychosocial approach
Itzhaky and Dekel (2008)	Community solidarity	Journal article	Community solidarity and pride
Rasi et al. (2012)	Empowering single mothers	Journal article	Cognitive and emotional development
Song (2011)	Empowerment strategies	Journal article	Intensive social interaction

This part of the section is built on the initial themes as identified for exploration from Box 2. The themes are thoroughly analysed in the light of the relevant empowerment components in the literature. At the end of each analysis, key themes on scopes and strategies are articulated, which are further analysed in Figure 2 to identify the emerging core concepts from the empowerment approaches (ICET).

4.4.1 Social rights approach

Lee (1996) published this book chapter, which discussed Jane Adams's Settlement Movements in the 1920's for the promotion of social justice, diversity and respect for the people in need. Jane Adam's social rights movement held the values of equality, justice, social reform and world consciousness and responsibility (Lee, 1996). The key approaches, which Adams and her movement adopted, were group work, discussion, dialogue and international and local action in the pursuit of social justice for oppressed people. These values and principles of social rights have relevant elements, which can guide our understanding to connect with the experiences of the families regarding building a future child protection framework, which can promote their empowerment. The identified scopes and strategies as noted under the method of analysis (discussed above) are social rights through an environment of respect, fairness and dialogue in pursuit of active partnership and social justice (Lee, 1996). The application of the empowerment process is directed towards an individual, group as well as at a community level.

4.4.2 Social capability approach

Developmental economist Amartya Sen's social capability approach has emerged as the global alternative to the standard framework for thinking about poverty, inequality and human development (Clarke, 2005). These literature sources were undertaken from Sen's published book and electronic journal paper (Sen, 1999; 2005) as well as linking publications by another author (e.g. Clarke, 2005). Sen's (1999; 2005) social capability approach offers a perspective on empowerment by achieving a full human life through self-sufficiency, self-respect and agency in an environment that guarantees equal opportunity for a better life. When people lack self-sufficiency, they are not able to obtain the resources essential to meet the necessities and conveniences of life. Sen (Clarke, 2005) compared this scenario with a diseased person who cannot absorb necessary goods for positive wellbeing. Self-respect requires the individual to be able to develop capacities which society recognises as common or within social norms, and not having such qualities would be treated as negative conduct. Agency refers to the

freedom to act, as one considers appropriate in terms of one's responsibility, which later will be judged by the society in terms of values and norms. Sen (2005) outlined that in our mind, the three abilities of self-sufficiency, self-respect and agency are needed to lead a full human life. Sen's work suggests that to lead a human life, free of poverty and inequality one needs to achieve the capability for assuming the responsibility for that life.

In a context of supporting any vulnerable groups like needy families involved with child protection services, the social capability approach recognises the families' need for socio-economic self-reliance, a sense of self-respect, confidence and social inclusion as a family unit in terms of their recognition, duties and responsibilities as parents. The empowerment goals reinforce the need for objective and compatible communication and engagement with the families. Whilst Sen advocated incorporating a social capability concept in the empowerment framework, he acknowledged the need for sensitive and objective understanding regarding behaviour and the actions of people who are grossly deprived of basic survival knowledge and skills (Sen, 1999). The identified scopes and strategies emerged from the discussion are that social capability consisting of self-sufficiency, self-respect, agency and generic dignity of human life. The application of the empowerment process is directed to the individual as well as at a group level.

4.4.3 Social justice approach

Lee (1996)'s published book chapter on empowerment approaches in a social work practice setting, locates human empowerment in social and economic justice at the interface of deprivation, pain and suffering. She presents that empowerment theory, alongside an integrative and holistic approach, gives us a framework to support needy and oppressed people. Lee also outlined an ecological approach in understanding the interdependence between living and non-living systems and the transactional nature of relationships and later outlined that conflict was a catalyst in developing potentialities of people and environment. The potentialities are the power base that are developed when there is "goodness of fit" between people and their environment. However, poor and marginalised people seldom have this "fit", as injustice may stifle human potential. It may be noted here that challenges in life are the source of upgrading human potential and resilience, which regenerate the power to deal with future challenges and generally remain perpetuating factors for developing a potential for empowerment. However, some members of the society are so overwhelmed with the challenges that they become the victims of the adversities when they need external support to rebuild their resilience. For example, there is numerous evidence, which suggests that some people can manage their early developmental trauma with/without appropriate

support, while some people struggle and turn to negative coping mechanisms (Department of Health, 2000; Spratt, 2009; OHCHR, 2007; Mullan, McAllister, Rollock and Fitzsimons, 2007; Shooter, 2008). This discussion seems to set the rationale for organising external support mechanisms for the people who are struggling to transform their social challenges into their own strengths. In this context, the major challenges for the service would be developing clarity of diverse developmental needs of people through appropriate assessment.

Lee (1996 p. 220) has developed a multifocal empowerment assessment framework (Fifocal Vision):

> A Historical Perspective: Understanding a group's history of social injustice and oppression and critical analysis of the historical social policy.

> An Ecological Perspective: Focusing on experiences of stress and the coping paradigm and other concepts related to coping (a transactional view of ego functioning that takes oppression into account, problem solving skills and cognitive processing of the false belief endangered with internalized oppression).

> Diversity Perspectives: Having a gender and social class perspective in developing power base in a family unit.

The identified scopes and strategies emerged are that the diverse developmental experiences in light of social justice like fairness and liberation from pain and sufferings set the scene for empowerment. The application of the empowerment process is directed to the individual, group as well as at the community level.

4.4.4 Human reflexivity approach

Simon (1990)'s work as published has outlined the key condition of empowerment as one's ability for self-criticism and determination to seek help for positive change. Simon (1990 p. 32) defined empowerment as a reflexive activity and also a process capable of being initiated and sustained only by (those) who seek power or self-determination.

In more specific terms, Simon stressed that the empowerment process resides in the person, not in the helper. She highlighted three integrated dimensions of empowerment:

a. To demonstrate a positive and potent ego;
b. To develop knowledge and the capacity to grasp social and political realities of one's environment;

c. To develop resources and strategies and functional competence for attainment of personal and collective social goals or liberation.

Simon's (1990) concept of empowerment underlines the keystone of social work in the context of human capability development (Sen, 2005) and universal wellbeing (Thyer, 2008). Simon's (1990) idea of reflexivity and a realistic sense of self represents as conditions for empowerment. The discussion emphasises the individual's ability to acknowledge his/her strength and difficulties plus understanding one's environment and above all openness in seeking help. These qualities of the help seeker are equally applicable for the help giver. As Lee (1996 p. 225) outlined that two components are required for empowerment: a caseworker with a raised consciousness and a client who seeks to be empowered.

In the application of the human reflexivity approach in the family empowerment context, critical self-awareness of the case worker is as important as the vulnerable families. However, the self-awareness of the worker is a significant necessity in building the process of self-awareness of the vulnerable clients, which will ultimately create the demand for empowerment intervention.

The identified scopes and strategies emerged from the discussion are about building self-critic skills, development of self-consciousness and awareness of oppression and accountability, which all set the process of empowerment. The application of this empowerment process is directed to the individual.

4.4.5 Empowerment as power

Page and Chzuba (1999) identified the concept of empowerment in the idea of power. They located the process of human empowerment in two different contexts. The contexts have been discussed as follows:

The empowerment process requires an open acknowledgement that in order for change one needs help for self-empowerment. According to Freire (1970), if people believe that power cannot change, as it is inherent, then empowerment is not possible. For example, if clients agree with the worker that they need to change and seek help then they can look at options in those directions but if they don't agree for change for whatever reason, empowerment is not possible (Freire, 1970). This means that the clients are not ready for a progressive change process and more work needs to be done in order to prepare the clients to integrate with the demand for change for empowerment.

The concept of empowerment depends on the hypothesis that power can expand (Freire, 1970). This denotes that power is a dynamic force. It neither exists in isolation nor is it inherent in people. Power is created in relationships that are also dynamic but it is always achieved through respect, collaboration and trust.

Page and Chzuba (1999) referred to empowerment as a changing process as it is not inherent, because empowerment is only possible if the person acknowledges his/her needs and endorses the necessity for empowerment. The key element in the empowerment approach is the need for a positive human engagement to reinforce the empowerment process. Freire (1970) described the process as People Empower People (PEP) and presented it in a critical adult education context. Meanwhile, PEP does not enforce the idea that power can be imposed on people but it is a humanistic process of offering opportunities, resources and support so that people become naturally involved themselves. Empowerment is a humanistic process.

The identified scopes and strategies that emerged from the discussion are that the empowerment process is facilitated through a mutually compatible interaction between the service provider and the receiver, when both are effectively ready for the intervention. The application of the empowerment concept is directed to the individual as well as in a group context.

4.4.6 Pedagogy approach

Freire (1970) developed his empowerment idea, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* on the hypothesis that human beings are generally capable of critical introspection of their world in a dialogical interaction and awareness with others and this is how people gain control over their lives and their environment. However, the key prerequisite regarding implementing this approach is creating the human relation conditions in interactions, which will allow people the freedom of choice to acknowledge the need for service. Freire (1970) presented it as a practice-based theory. The approach promotes strength and wellbeing factors through relationships based practice while incorporating reflection, teamwork and practical assistance.

This theoretical approach compliments the social reflexivity (Simon, 1990) approach, which calls for openness and critical reflection as conditions for empowerment. Simultaneously, a Pedagogy approach also endorses that, in general, people by nature are capable of critical introspection. In the application of the approach for empowering vulnerable clients (e.g. the vulnerable families), the value of dialogue and acceptance of people's capability for   critical

introspection reiterate the need for creating a conducive environment for effective engagement with the families in the empowerment process.

The identified scopes and strategies which emerged from the discussion are that the empowerment process facilitates critical interaction and support by building competence in both contexts. The application of the empowerment process is directed to the individual as well as in group context.

4.4.7 Group work and community solidarity approach

The social group work, under the community solidarity concept was advocated by Pernell (1986 p. 111) who referred to group work as a natural vehicle for empowerment. Pernell highlighted that case workers should be aware of power insufficiency, inequality in the relationships and communication with clients. In the context of her work with the African American community, Pernell (1986 p. 111) states:

> Empowerment as a goal is a political position, as it challenges the status quo and attempts to change the existing power relationships…It goes beyond "enabling". It requires of the worker the ability to analyse the social process and interpersonal behaviour in terms of power and powerlessness and to enable members to develop skills using their influence effectively.

The discussion clearly outlines that worker-client relationships need to be liberated from power relationships (i.e. powerful and powerless). It goes beyond simple 'enabling' to building (for the worker) evidence based effective engagement skills compatible with the preparation of the clients for the engagement and facilitation of the empowerment process.

Transferring power to a disempowered person needs to follow some strict ground realities to effectively match social compatibility between the worker and the parents. In light of Pernell (1986), the empowerment process should facilitate adequate support for the service users to acknowledge their responsibilities and take active initiative for change in an individual, group and community level.

The issues of power imbalance, social injustice, cultural and racial insensitivity across the society including a culturally diverse population are also key relevant factors that can be taken into consideration in individual, group or community based intervention. So, the discussion helps us to understand the value of appropriate awareness, compatibility and a sense of

belongingness in safe environment (i.e. liberation from mutual power imbalance and segregation) in fostering empowerment in individual as well as in group context.

The identified scopes and strategies emerged from the discussion outline a process of human empowerment in individual, group and community context in an enabling atmosphere with appropriate support, safety, equality and compatibility. The application of the empowerment process is directed to the individual, group and community contexts.

4.4.8 Gandhian approach

Gandhi referred to empowerment as the democratic decentralisation of power and authority among people in general, particularly the marginalised, who are victims of the social and economic class division (Bisha, 2009; Gandhi Research Foundation, 2015). Gandhi wanted to see empowerment through a threefold change process: change in people's mind; change in people's lives and change in the society. He advocated for "Sarvodya" (universal development) and strongly advocated for social justice for the poor and disadvantaged Indians while referring to them as *Harijan* (God's people). The Gandhian developmental approach has been deeply inspired by John Ruskin's collection of essays, in which Ruskin lays out his humanist theory of economics and calls for inculcating values of social justice, morality and higher aesthetics in government interventions (Gandhi Research Foundation, 2015)**.** However, the specific reference that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all people has influenced the multi-dimensional developmental approach. Gandhi used this broader development approach as a tool to advocate for the uplifting of the conditions of the poor and marginalised as a way forward for the development of the whole nation (Gandhi Research Foundation, 2015). Drawing on Gandhian perspectives, the vulnerability of parents may be approached through multi-dimensional perspectives by supporting them in their thinking, living standard, social exclusion, stigma and injustice.

The identified scopes and strategies which emerged from the discussion are that empowerment is a multidimensional social process to uplift people's quality of life in individual, group and community contexts under a larger goal of universal development. Gandhi advocates for an environment of social justice with liberation from oppression and social exclusion to facilitate the process of empowerment. The application of the empowerment process is directed in community context.

4.4.9 Human development approach

The discourse of empowerment can be drawn on the idea of human development as implicit in the United Nation's Human Development Report. Mahabub Ul Haque is the key architect of this concept. Haque (1989) referred to development as "freedom of choice of the people" and this will be reflected through the creation of an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests. Development also involves greater access to knowledge, better nutrition and health care, secure livelihoods, protection against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, social, political and cultural freedom and a sense of belonging in community activities. Human development seems shares a common vision with human rights. In addition, in pursuing capabilities and realising rights, this freedom is vital. It is also equally important that people can develop capabilities to realise and perform duties and responsibilities in terms of their social roles and relationships (Haque, 1989).

The human development approach has articulated a wider vision of empowerment by establishing a link between diverse developmental needs and freedom from disadvantage and oppression. The key focus seems to be building up an overall living standard or quality of life. The development approach also illustrated an inter-connection of needs in individual, group and community or systemic domains. In the application of the approach in supporting the vulnerable people, like the struggling families involved with the public child protection services, the empowerment process can be located in the context of the individual needs of parents and children and wider needs of the family, including uplifting their social environment.

The identified scopes and strategies which emerged from the discussion highlight the need for appropriate assessment of the diverse wider needs of people in the context of the immediate needs. The process involves supporting clients to get ready and be compatible to participate any empowerment process. The application of the empowerment process is directed to the individual, group as well as in a community context.

4.4.10 Psychosocial approach

Speer and Peterson (2000) have outlined a psychological process of human empowerment in the interface of the individual, organisational and the community context under the categories of cognitive, emotional and behavioural development. They have developed a 27-item empowerment assessment measure, based on a random sample of 974 respondents, at an individual level of analysis that captures cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions in

the context of community organization. This tool was initially developed to measure the empowerment status of clients in a deaddiction service. It was then recognised that this tool had multiple applications in different other fields with appropriate modification.

Erikson (Greene, 2008)'s psychosocial development theory has also offered a psychosocial element of human development in a staged process. He identified eight major life stages like Infancy, Early Childhood, Play age, School Age, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, Adulthood and Old Age where each stage builds on the experiences of the former stage. For example, if a child experiences trauma in early childhood, there will be likely impact on future developmental stages unless it is appropriately addressed. Erikson referred to psychological health as a source of ego strength and a means of seeking social support. Social alienation and confused self-identity may develop due to lack of appropriate resolution of developmental issues/crises. Erikson recommended an insight-focused intervention in relation to a difficult developmental past (Greene, 2008).

Meanwhile, Erikson's approach has been criticised by Gilligan (as cited in Green, 2008 p. 250) that stages of psychosocial development theory do not capture diverse socialization and life experiences of people particularly the different experiences of men and women. Greene (2008) questioned the psychosocial approach philosophically, that the humanistic perspective diminishes the concept of identity formation through varying developmental experiences. However, all aspects of human development need to be understood against the background of the social context, consequences and social injustice experience at a trans-generational level (Carr, 2006). Erikson's work on Gandhi's biography and his appreciation regarding Gandhi's using tools of fasting, nonviolence and non-cooperation to fight against social oppression and inequality reflects his respect for empowerment approach based on moral values and universal conscience. However, Erikson's stage model has been criticised because they do not take into consideration the culture, sexual orientation, family form or presence of economic disadvantage, which all contribute to human development (Greene, 2008). Critiques have also been offered in ecological context that understanding the sense of identity of an ethnic community group needs awareness of different culturally oriented factors that underpins forming racial identity, which are ignored in psychosocial development theory (Greene, 2008).

The identified scopes and strategies which emerged from the discussion outline that the psychosocial approach which refer to the comprehensive nature of human needs (physical, emotional and social) should be taken into consideration with equal priorities in the empowerment process of individual or group members of a unit. The application of the empowerment process is directed primarily to the individual as well as in a group context.

Recent empowerment applications internationally:

4.4.11 Community pride approach in Israel

Itzhaky and Dekel (2008) undertook a study on the empowerment effectiveness of community pride approach in terms of positive sense of cultural identity and community cohesiveness. The participants were a group of Israeli mothers who were exposed to ongoing political conflict and war in the region. The focus of the study was to review the empowerment impact of the workshop on the thirty-eight women who participated in the intensive workshop based methods. The empowerment impact has been defined as an improved sense of belonging to the community, reduction in stress symptoms and an improved sense of security during the period of sectarian war and attacks. The experiment lasted for six months. The trial intervention offered the women appropriate information, skills training and education to participate in supporting community-based rehabilitation of the displaced Israeli war victims in the background of enhancing a sense of pride and belonging to the Israeli community. At the end of the study, a qualitative evaluation was undertaken, which indicated that most of the women who participated in the study, reported feeling better, had a sense of security and belongingness, which according to the research design are signs of empowerment. The other significant feature of the study, was the careful consideration given to the women's comprehensive needs: participation needs; skill development needs; cultural cohesiveness needs and specific individual practical needs of the family (e.g. parent-child relationships, child care, budgeting, planning responsibilities). These support services gave freedom to the participants to actively engage in the empowerment intervention. Itzhaky and Dekel (2008 p.473) discussed the value of a community based approach specifically in a vulnerable community context. The findings support the view that community intervention is still a viable and important method of work for community workers and other human service providers in politically disturbed communities.

The community belonging approach articulates that empowerment does not happen in isolation. The empowerment process should be carefully planned by taking into consideration all the associated needs of the clients to enhance their capability for engagement in the process. For example, this workshop-based study clearly demonstrated the evidential outcome of the empowerment workshops which was based on the freeing of the participants by addressing their diverse practical needs. The experiment reinforces and advocates a number of empowerment approaches, like group work and a solidarity approach (Pernell, 1986), social rights and social and economic justice (Lee, 1996), a social capability approach

(Sen, 1999; 2005), human development (Haque, 1989) and people empower people approach (Freire, 1970).

The identified scopes and strategies which emerged from the discussion are that building people's capacity to manage difficult challenges, people's realisations of being supported, a sense of belonging and community solidarity are important elements for empowerment. The empowerment process should be carefully planned by taking into consideration all the associated needs of the clients to enhance their capability for engagement in the intervention process. The application of the empowerment process is directed to the individual, group as well as in a community context.

4.4.12 *Rahyab*: Empowerment through cognitive and emotional skill development in Iran

Rahyab is a Persian word, which means "finding one's way". The concept of *Rahyab* is based on empowering clients with independent problem solving skills by strengthening cognitive and emotional skills. Rasi, Moula, Puddephatt and Timpka (2012) applied this process when working with a group of single mothers in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The approach focused on maximising autonomy and self-direction in those clients who faced difficulties in their social lives. The key method of the model was inspired by person-in-environment perspectives, which focused on the interaction of the cognitive and emotional factors alongside environmental factors to determine the extent of goal attainment (Rasi et al., 2012). The rationale behind this approach is supported by a recent discovery in neuroscience that human emotions do not block, but rather facilitate rational thinking and decision making, apart from contributing to the richness of human experience (Rasi el al., 2012). Rasi et al. (2012)'s model is also supported by evidence from neurobiological sciences which state that emotion and cognition compliment each other in facilitating adaptation in the environment through rational adaptability and behaviour (Purves, Brannon, Cabeza, Huettel, LaBar, Platt and Woldorff, 2008; Rasi et al., 2012; Damasio, 2003). The inspiring principles are also similar to radical pedagogy and dialogic perspective (Freire, 1970). The Rahyab perspective is based on two components: enhancing cognitive faculty and resources and the development of an individual's social capacity to mobilise resources to address individual issues. The study was conducted with 15 women, all of whom were single mothers, who participated in the empowerment trial. The trial lasted for 7 months, on a schedule of 10 hours a week, through individual and group sessions. In the end, the researchers noted that the women who engaged effectively could make reasonable decisions to improve their life situations, relationships and the finding of a job. However, it was noted that there was no follow up investigation regarding

the response of the disengaged participants as well as the reasons behind their disengagement. The study reiterates the need for connection between the service provider and receiver rather than rationalising the poor outcome of the service as the fault of the client/s.

The identified scopes and strategies emerged from the experiment indicate that if appropriately supported, human beings have cognitive and emotional potential for progressive change and can achieve self-reliance by making effective decisions in their lives. The findings also advocate the need for appropriate engagement and the necessity for creating a conducive situation in the cliental interaction for a positive service outcome. The experiments reinforce the biopsychosocial approach (Speer and Paterson, 2000), empowerment as power (Page and Chuzaba, 1999), a social capability approach (Sen, 1999; 2005) and the human reflexivity approach (Simon, 1990). The application of the empowerment process is directed primarily at the individual as well as in a group context.

4.4.13 Intensive social interaction approach in Taiwan

Song's (2011) intensive social interaction approach aims at enhancing social functioning and the quality of life of clients in the context of domestic violence relationships through frequent direct interaction with them from a mutually beneficial perspective. The indicative variables of empowerment chosen are life satisfaction, control tendencies of the perpetrator (of domestic violence), levels of services offered and percentage of two to three contacts with clients per month. The study is primarily inspired by Chinese cultural values, derived from Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, which preach inclusion, wholeness, comprehensiveness, dynamic balance between opposites, and a positive integration of inner to outer-self (Song, 2011). Song also articulated a Chinese empowerment perspective of generating awareness about one's own mind and accepting the true self in the current moment as a starting point for progressive change. The study was conducted on case management experiences of 25 social workers in Taiwan to explore the strength based changes that happened with the clients as well as in themselves. The findings of the study indicate that empowerment is a mutually beneficial process between social workers and clients even though it was driven by the needs of the clients. The study also suggested that the possibility of empowerment can be enhanced through more frequent strength focused contacts made by social workers.

Song (2011 p.1032) also discussed the value of a strength focused approach in generating empowerment:

> Strengths, perspective and reframing were the most utilised strategies
> to help clients to recognise their own positive qualities and abilities, to

facilitate clients to reframe their cognitive framework and to understand that they do have alternatives and choices. Evidently, strengths perspective is a major strategy for empowerment. This perspective places emphasis on helping clients to realise their own inner and environmental strengths through establishing genuine relationships between clients and practitioners.

The other noticeable findings of the study include the importance of communication and engagement between the worker and client and a need to acknowledge that empowerment intervention is a mutually beneficial process. Apart from the value of frequent communication with clients regarding their wellbeing, the social experiment acknowledges the need for professional openness to learn about the client's unique life experiences for future knowledge development and improvement of service. The discussion also advocates for the worker to develop a capacity for appropriate interaction with the client that facilitates mutual empowerment. The strengths focused intensive interaction approach connects and reinforces a number of empowerment approaches: social rights (Lee, 1996) due to elements of integration and discussion; social capability (Sen, 1999; 2005) in terms of support and capability building scope; social justice (Lee, 1996) through building connection (with client) through support in fairness; human reflexivity (Simon, 1990) in terms of building positive awareness about positive wellbeing needs; people empower people (Freire, 1970) through strength based interactions; human development (Haque,1989) in terms of creating choices for clients for service, which matters to them; psychosocial (Speer and Paterson, 2000) to explore and monitor comprehensive needs of clients, which may not always be possible through limited interactions; community solidarity (Itzaky and Dekel, 2008) by enhancing the clients' sense of belonging with the service through increasing interactions and the *Rahyab* approach (Rasi et al., 2012) in terms of enhancing effective decision making skills, as a sign of improved cognitive and emotional functioning, through frequent professional interactions.

The identified scopes and strategies which emerged from the discussion outline the significant values and scopes attached to frequent communication and interaction with clients regarding their social and emotional wellbeing. The findings also highlight the need for professional openness to learn about the client's unique life experiences for future knowledge development and improvement of service. The study also advocated for the worker to develop a capacity to organise a humanistic interaction with the client that facilitates mutual empowerment. The application of the empowerment process is directed primarily to the individual as well as in a group context.

4.5 Meta-synthesis of identified scopes and strategies of empowerment

The meta-synthesis process has analysed the diverse empowerment approaches in an effort to develop a consolidated theoretical construct of empowerment for the purpose of analysing the primary data. Building on the previous explorations of the empowerment approaches guided by the first three steps of Noblit and Hare (1988), the synthesis process has now focused on the identified (emerging) scopes and strategies of empowerment guided by the next four steps of Noblit and Hare (1988):

iv.   Identifying the relationship between the different approaches

v.   Translating into one another

vi.   Synthesising translations

vii.   Articulating the synthesis

The synthesis process not only focused on the literal meanings and contexts but also the deeper interpretations in contexts. These were all directed to articulate the emerging core concepts from each empowerment approach (Cairns and Murray, 2015).

The empowerment perspectives have outlined different meanings, scopes and challenges of empowerment in terms of: social capability (Sen, 1984, Echavarri, 2003); generic human needs and an ability to be educated and empowered (Freire, 1970); social, cognitive and emotional skills development (Speer and Paterson, 2000); cognitive and emotional empowerment (Rasi et al., 2012); need for insight and critical self-reflection (Simon, 1990); need for social justice in the context of gender, race and economic inequality (Lee, 1996). The human development perspective advocates for freedom of choice and access to reasonable social resources to lead a dignified human life (Haque, 1989). The group work and community development approach pursue empowerment strategies in group and community contexts, which also share the wisdom of the Gandhian concept of universal development (Gandhi Research Foundation, 2015; Pernell, 1986). The ethnic and community solidarity approach as utilised and experimented by Page and Chzuba (1999) in South America and Itzhaky and Dekel (2008) in Israel, demonstrates the strength of group work and, in the broader context, a community organization approach. After analysing the nature and objectives of the approaches in a previous section of the chapter, the researcher noted a clear boundary in terms of stages of focus in the development process. The approaches have focused on impacting and influencing in the micro context like the individual and group level (Sen, 1984; Echavarri, 2003; Freire, 1970; Speer and Paterson, 2000; Rasi et al., 2012; Simon, 1990;

Germain, 1991; Gutierrez, 1989; Haque, 1989; Lee, 1996) as well as in the macro context like the community or systemic level (Lee, 1996; Haque, 1989; Page and Chzuba, 1999; Itzhaky and Dekel, 2008; Song, 2011; Pernell, 1986). Some approaches have contributed in a universal context by contributing in individual, group and community/systemic or organisational domains[8].

The commonality of the approaches in terms of empowerment can be located in individual and/or group and/or community contexts. While the application of the themes has outlined the levels of applications of empowerment approaches, another important connection can be drawn by the integration and interdependency of the approaches through the stages. This can be seen in the explicit example of a client's or a group of clients' motivational needs determined by the system's quality of managing the wider motivational needs to foster readiness and compatibility to engage with the service. Itzhaky and Dekel (2008) noted that their empowerment experiment was successful largely because of the project's commitment to taking care of the participant's whole needs, which offered appropriate freedom to the participants to engage in the project. In another context, it is observed that even though financial support was organised for the participants under the Rahyab project (Rasi et al., 2012); the empowerment goals were not achieved for the specific participants who were not engaged appropriately and missed out on the benefits of support offered. Even though the project was entirely devoted to empowering the women in their individual context, the negative outcomes reiterated the value of practical support and associated motivational factors in engagement with the service (Itzhaky and Dekel, 2008). While the analysis synthesises that a human empowerment process requires the addressing of the whole needs (practical, social, cultural and economic) of the clients, the process is interlinked in individual, group and systemic stages. In the process of building engagement and motivational needs of the clients, Song (2011) has added a new social dimension like the workers need to value the richness of human experiences and the process of empowerment is mutually beneficial. In relation to mutually beneficial outcomes of empowerment, it is important to mention here that the application is quite a significant challenge for the system, as pragmatic experiences suggest that helping families in a child protection context is often considered as a one way street and the families are often perceived with stigma and negative attitudes at the professional level (Batty, 2003; Devaney, Lazenbatt and Bunting, 2011; Turnell et al., 2007; Khan and Miles, 2011) rather than an opportunity for future knowledge and service development. The social compatibility factor as advocated in this chapter is a method for unique human interaction, which has the potential to empower the worker and the client to establish a respectful,

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[8] Community is referred here in the context of a specific societal and geographical domain e.g. X community living in Y geographical area having shared values, norms and goals. And System is referred to in the context of a specific formal organisation in a geographical domain e.g. child protection service in Z area governed under a specific jurisdiction and policy framework and authority.

integrative, sustainable and educational partnership to achieve the best outcome for the long-term wellbeing of the children and parents.

In the course of meta-synthesis of the identified scopes and strategies of the empowerment approaches, the data has been integrated in the following table and then synthesised into different core categories.

4.6 Emerging levels and core concepts following meta-synthesis of empowerment approaches

Table 2: Meta-synthesis of empowerment approaches

Empowerment approaches	Identified scopes and strategies	Identified levels of applications	Emerging core categories
Social rights approach	Promotion of social integration through discussion, dialogues in pursuit of active partnership and social justice	Individual, group and community situations	Integration and partnership
Social capability approach	Self-sufficiency, self-respect, agency and generic dignity set the significance of human empowerment.	Individual and group situations	Self-reliance and dignity
Social justice approach	Transparency, fairness, liberation from pain and sufferings set the scene for empowerment	Individual, group and community situations	Freedom, fairness and openness
Human reflexivity approach	Building self-critic skills, development of self-consciousness and awareness of oppression and accountability sets the process of empowerment	Individual situation	Self-awareness and accountability
Empowerment as power	Empowerment process is facilitated through a mutually compatible interaction between the service provider and the receiver who both are effectively ready for the intervention.	Individual and group situations	Strength based interactions in a mutually compatible process
Pedagogy approach	Critical interactions in a supportive environment can facilitate competence in both contexts	Individual, group and systemic situations	Building knowledge through critical interactions and support
Group work and solidarity approach	Process of empowerment in cohesive group or community solidarity context in an environment of safety and fairness	Group and community situations	Capacity building through a sense of belongingness and support
Universal development approach	Universal development in an environment of social justice and support	Group and community situations	Empowerment through universal development
Human Development approach	Freedom of choice and a basic quality of living arrangements	Individual, group and community situations	Freedom of choice in the standard of living arrangements
Psychosocial approach	Psychosocial approach refers the comprehensive nature of human needs (physical, emotional and social), which should be taken into consideration with equal priorities	Individual and group situations	Attainment of physiological, emotional and social needs

Community solidarity and pride approach	Sense of belongingness and community pride are important elements for empowerment. The empowerment process should be taking into consideration all the associated needs of the clients to enhance their capability for engagement in the intervention process	Individual, group and community situations	Social integration via sense of belonging and integration in the community
Empowerment through cognitive and emotional skill development	Human beings have cognitive and emotional potential for achieving self-reliance by making effective decisions in their lives through adequate supports and conducive atmosphere	Individual, group and community situations	Cognitive and emotional skill development through effective engagement and support
Intensive social interaction approach	The value of frequent communication with clients regarding their wellbeing. The need for professional openness to learn about the client's unique life experiences for future knowledge development and improvement of service. The discussion also advocates for the workers to develop a capacity to organise a humanistic interaction with the client that facilitate mutual empowerment	Individual, group and community situations	Frequent social communication and interaction facilitate mutual empowerment

In the course of meta-synthesis of the empowerment approaches, 13 core categories have been located, which are integrated with several similarities as well as contrast. In terms of applications, the core categories have been located as per their applications in 3 different levels, individual; group and community or systemic domains. The levels of applications have been reinterpreted as stages or domains of application for the convenience of presentation in the study. Accordingly, the identified three fundamental domains/stages presented here alongside the identified corresponding core categories, which facilitated the process of empowerment. The domain or stages have been identified as stage 1, stage 2 and stage 3. The stage 1 domain facilitates capacity building in the individual level; stage 2 domain facilitates capacity building in the group level and stage 3 domain facilitates capacity building in the community or systemic level.

4.7 Development of integrated construct of empowerment theories (ICET)

The 13 core categories have been located as per their objectives, nature and process of empowerment under the three stage domains as identified. In terms of relationships, some categories have overlapped, connected or contrasted with broader integrating values to each other for the common purpose of empowerment. The core categories have together created an integrated construct, which the researcher has referred to as Integrated Construct of Empowerment Theories (ICET) as a working model/lens.

Integrating and contrasting relationships of diverse empowerment approaches

Empowerment approaches	Tier 1: Individual/Professional capacity building domain	Tier 2: Group capacity building domain	Tier 3: Community or systemic capacity building domain
Social rights (Lee, 1996)	Integration and partnership	Integration and partnership	Integration and partnership
Social capability (Sen, 1999;2005)	Self-reliance and dignity	Self-reliance and dignity	-
Social justice (Lee, 1996)	Freedom, fairness and openness	Freedom, fairness and openness	Freedom, fairness and openness
Human reflexivity (Simon, 1990)	Self-awareness and accountability	-	-
Empowerment as power (Page and Chzuba, 1999)	Strength based interactions in a mutually compatible process	Strength based interactions in a mutually compatible process	-
Pedagogy (Freire, 1970)	Building knowledge through critical interactions, awareness and support	Building knowledge through critical interactions, awareness and support	Building knowledge through critical interactions, awareness and support
Group work and solidarity (Pernell, 1986)	-	Capacity building through a sense of belongingness and supports	Capacity building through a sense of belongingness and supports
Universal development (Gandhi Research Foundation, 2015)	-	Empowerment through universal development	Empowerment through universal development
Human development (Haque, 1989)	Freedom of choice in the standard of living arrangements	Freedom of choice in the standard of living arrangements	Freedom of choice in the standard of living arrangements
Psychosocial development (Speer and Peterson, 2000)	Attainment of physiological, emotional and social needs	Attainment of physiological, emotional and social needs	-
Community solidarity and pride (Itzaky and Dekel, 2008)	Social integration via sense of belonging and integration in the community	Social integration via sense of belonging and integration in the community	Social integration via sense of belonging and integration in the community
Cognitive and emotional development (Rasi et al., 2012)	Cognitive and emotional skill development through effective engagement and support	Cognitive and emotional skill development through effective engagement and support	Cognitive and emotional skill development through effective engagement and support
Intensive social interactions (Song, 2011)	Frequent social communication and interaction facilitate mutual empowerment	Frequent social communication and interaction facilitate mutual empowerment	Frequent social communication and interaction facilitate mutual empowerment

Figure 2: Integrated Construct of Empowerment Theories (ICET)

The thirteen core categories, as emerged from the empowerment theories, have evolved into a broader three tier concept map of empowerment: individual capacity building; group capacity building and community or systemic capacity building. In terms of working definition, community is referred here in accommodating diverse population group in a geographical territory. And, system is referred here in organisational context like public child protection system, which involves the child protection team operating under a defined policy, legislation and political domain in a jurisdiction that inform the nature of functioning of the whole service like frontline practice or out of home care management. The thirteen core categories have

contributed in building the pathways of the concept map in terms of their specific core values. The inter-relationship of the tiers has defined the integration of different domains, individual, groups (e.g. primary group like the family) and communities/systems, which are all areas for empowerment. The three-tier integrated construct of the empowerment model has been used to map the analysed data from the families regarding their experiences and aspirations from the child protection services.

The chronological order and relationships of the three domains as outlined (Figure 2) are integrated and interdependent in relation to their objectives of empowering the individual, group and the community or (whole) system. Even though the identified stages of empowerment are separated in three different tiers, they are integrated under the broad vision of facilitating empowerment. This followed the stage process; as we know a collection of individuals create a group and a number of groups create a community. The capacity of individuals will impact on the local group's capacity and the capacity of different groups will impact on the capacity of the community/organisation and so on (in a larger community context). So, an individual's capacity may likely be cited through a group capacity and progress of groups may be registered in the community/organisation's capacity. The process can also be repeated the other way around. Community capacity development may outline generic indicators of capacity development of the diverse social groups and individuals. However, the top to down chronological (i.e. larger community domain to individual domain) approach may provide a mean number but does not always reflect capacity or wellbeing of all the individuals or groups. For example, as per human development index (UNDP, 2014), Australia has ranked 2nd in the world with Gross Domestic Product as well as being 2nd best liveable country in the world. However, in terms of the social inequality standard, the HDI falls from 0.933 to 0.860 with a loss of 7.8%, and in terms of gender inequality index (GII) the ranking falls to 19 in the world (UNDP, 2014).

Also, the rate of 27.2 per 1,000 children received child protection services, with 7 times more likelihood of Indigenous children being involved with the child protection systems (AIHW, 2015) is quite alarming. These recent statistics reflect the invisibility of need within developed high indexed countries as depicted in the figure of the Human Development Index score of Australia.

Sen's (1984; 2005) social capability theory shows that the GDP of a country does not necessarily guarantee capability of all people be able to connect with the prosperity of the nation. Sen suggested the need to create 'nourished opportunities' for the specific vulnerable people to facilitate their participation in the empowerment process at their pace.

In spite of the moral arguments and human rights based focus, the issues of vulnerable people are unique and multi-dimensional and hence empowerment approaches need a broader vision to address the multiple levels; individual, group and community/systemic domains. This discussion notices the scope for empowerment pathways in multi-dimensional perspectives, from community capacity building to individual capacity building as well as individual capacity building to community capacity building.

4.8 Critiques and limitations

The empowerment approaches have contributed in elucidating the process of empowering the individual, group and community or system/organisation. Even though the approaches served the purpose of the chapter by reflecting on diverse scopes and processes of imparting strength and richness in the quality of human functioning, limited emphasis has been placed on discussing practical approaches on the major challenge of reaching out to the "hard to reach" most vulnerable people (e.g. highly demoralised and alienated parents struggling to engage with the child protection services) by dealing with their lived experience of struggles, humiliation and alienation. The theories of empowerment are important, but these do not clarify the practicality of building an appropriate connection between provider and receiver to facilitate transfer of power/support and realisation of empowerment. The meta-synthesis offers a number of components like development of self-awareness, intensive interactions, group work, creating opportunities and an environment of fairness, providing appropriate education etc., which all significantly contribute in the discussion but the key question remains - the objective "practically how" process. The international experiments broadly based on the ideas including offering practical support to the clients, which also reinforced a number of empowerment approaches. However, what is not clarified in the approaches is the process of building the humanistic bridge between the service provider and the service receivers to facilitate actual transfer of power, which can be realised by people and can be (visually) witnessed (Rappaport, 1987).

Meta-synthesis of the empowerment approaches played a significant part in the qualitative analysis and building the theoretical construct. In this research the credibility and trust worthiness of the outcome of qualitative meta-synthesis has been articulated through the process of triangulation in an effort to measure and map out the findings (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell, 2007; Erwin et al., 2011). The triangulation and mapping out process has been undertaken in Chapter 6 where the ICET model has been utilised in structuring and mapping out the empowerment components and process as reflected through the views and aspiration of the participant families.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented a theoretical construct of empowerment drawing on meta-synthesis of a range of empowerment concepts and frameworks. It presented a broad discussion about theoretical and practical approaches of human empowerment from a wide range of disciplines. The empowerment concepts and frameworks were qualitatively approached and meta-synthesised as per their nature, scope and processes, which all consolidated a theoretical staged model/lens (ICET) for the purpose of mapping the analysed primary data.

As discussed in the methodology (Chapter 3), the first aspect of meta-synthesis of some literature started much earlier and the process was renewed. The process of understanding the meta-synthesis has increased the researcher's knowledge about the qualitative data analysis technique, its process (e.g. keeping and presenting full statistical records regarding exclusion process, sources) and its application (e.g. structuring process). Now, if the author has a chance to apply the technique again in undertaking research he will approach it differently building on the current knowledge and understanding.

The next chapter presents the findings from the primary data.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the primary data. The presentation of the primary data has been organised under the emerging themes and sub-themes, explored through the verbatim transcripts as identified by Ryan and Bernard (2003). The analysis process is informed by the critical theoretical process, which provided a framework not only in the process of qualitative analysis but has been influenced by articulating the voices of the families in offering critiques informed by their lived experiences. As discussed in the methodology chapter, in application of the critical theoretical process, the primary data itself represented the families' reasoning and scrutiny of the child protection services as it was experienced and understood, which is informed by Sen's public reasoning and valuational scrutiny theory (Sen, 1999; 2005). The analysis of the primary data was approached through exploring the families' practical experiences, critical reflections and judgements based on their service experiences, which is informed by Habermas's critical social theory (Habermas, 1986; Ngwenyama, 2002) and the whole data collection and analysis process was managed under the caring values of moral philosophy principles (Gray, 2010). The analysed findings have been approached and presented in consolidated form with direct or indirect commentaries. The emerging themes and subthemes from the findings have been discussed in an order (with numbers) to bring coherence in presentations. The voices of the families reflect their intense and in-depth messages, which are often intertwined with different issues and found to be very difficult to separate at times with clear boundaries, risking undermining them through separation. The researcher divided the findings under themes and subthemes in terms of nature of contents and aims of the study. The analysis process has later combined the themes into broader themes, which are then located into three core categories of themes based on the nature, scope and directions of the broader themes.

5.1 Ignoring and undermining the families' openness to engage

The data which relates to this theme presents the families' open reflections on protective services' concerns and involvement. The contexts of these voluntarily based early intervention requests to child protection services were variables; parental separation, domestic violence, allegations of sexual abuse, parental substance misuse, parental mental illness, which all contributed to significant behavioural implications to children and associated family support and guidance needs. Under these background, the families contacted central intake in some of these instances. It is important to acknowledge that while central intake's role can be to provide referrals and ideas they legislatively cannot intervene unless there are child protection concerns. The family members spontaneously engaged in the conversations with the researcher and expressed their views regarding the reasons for their engagement with the public child protection services. Ten participants acknowledged the backgrounds of the statutory child protection service's intervention and despite not always agreeing with the outcomes, they demonstrated some insight into the role of child protection services. For example, one parent who is a victim of domestic violence commented:

> *Everybody in the community needs to know what family services are all about, they not just dramatically take away children from the family, they take them away from domestic violence situations*

This comment suggests that parents are not unaware to the role of CPS. Another parent whose children were removed from her care due to an allegation of physical assault commented:

> *Smacking children is wrong, I understand now…I made a mistake and I will never do it again.*

A grandparent acknowledged the child protection concerns in her daughter's parenting but felt the nature of statutory response further deteriorated the mother's parenting situation amidst alienation from seeking help from anybody:

> *The problem she had she was in an abusive relationship...taking amphetamine … the fact that they took her children away, I think had a lot to do her going on to drugs as she was self-medicating….if she received supports, she should not have felt alone. Loss of children devastated her...had she had the support, I could support her*

A father acknowledged the value of involvement with the services while expressing concerns regarding the negative impact due to the nature of the intervention:

> *It was valuable experience but in terms of relationship between parent and child, it was extremely damaging for no good reason……I believe if the child is at risk then it should be wake up call for the department to work with the parents to remove the risks, removing the child is very damaging and particularly for the parents*

Here a mother acknowledged the role and actions of child protection services with her expectation not to be mistreated:

> *Some time they do good job, some children need to be saved …they do….. even then they shouldn't treat the parents like dog*

These comments suggest that these parents did acknowledge the concerns and the need for protective intervention. While the parents in this study could acknowledge the concerns, they were almost unanimous in their criticism of the ways in which CPS went about their intervention. In all situations parents felt they were left unsupported isolated and/or humiliated, which raises concerns around ethical values in professional practice.

5.2 Missed opportunities before, during and after intervention

This theme reflected the families' experiences of seeking help from the public child protection services before any formal involvement with the services. There were families who voluntarily contacted the services, before statutory intervention, for practical support to improve their parenting capacity and better manage their children's needs. Five families reported that they had contacted the services in the pre-intervention stage for consultations and guidance to manage complex specific situations which caused concerns for them.

Here are a few comments, which reflect the families' frustrations as well as their expectation of getting early help:

> *If they dealt with this when I first went to them to be a lab (*laboratory*) rat…test me with 5 professionally educated people who knew how to treat human life, this would have been closed…*

> *If I did not have a 25-year-old uni student, fresh out of uni into the department of child safety… then I may have stood a chance… if I had somebody who said to me, "ok **** (father's name), we have concerns, we are going to remove the children but you can still be with your partner... this (the process) may take 2 years or 3 years or 5 years, you still get to see the children", then one day, the miracle of the Lord, the Department of Child Safety, turns up and say…… "sorry for taking so long,*

> *we have to make sure you could be good parent, here is your license to be a parent"…… (then) you will not be sitting here.*
>
> *If they had done something (earlier), you would not have been sitting here.*
>
> *I approached the department with the kids for help, they gave me couple of ideas…but in a nutshell, they say unless children are abused we can't help you. I was having tremendous problem with the children…very very difficult to manage the rivalry, age gap, the emotions they were going through about their mum walked out, the ugliness of the (parental) separations…*
>
> *Last time it took them three months to give me any sort of directions that I already done… counselling for domestic violence, rehousing…I think if they were honest, if they were truly working to help me, the situation things would be different….clear directions with phone… how to access the various things that would have been helpful*

It was noted that one parent requested specialist help on anger management, three families requested children's behaviour support and one family requested mental health support. However, all the families felt they did not receive adequate help. One parent shared his experiences:

> *DoCS says that I need to link back into the mental health unit that I was talking to before, but how I find them I don't know …*

The comments of the parents reflect their concerns regarding dependability and competency of the service in acknowledging support needs in a timely way leading to their sense of anxiety, frustration and helplessness.

A father wanted to improve his parenting skills through co-parenting with the foster carers but felt he missed the opportunity by the service:

> *I had a fantastic rapport with my daughter's foster carer. If I am kept on the information loop and on board, I am able to raise the issues with my daughter to co-parent to help my children…..but the department twisted the truth and set their own agenda*

The comments suggest how the families earnestly sought help while volunteering to be critically assessed and work with the system, and even offered ideas (i.e. help pathways) but felt their requests were not addressed, were ignored, and not reciprocated with much needed help and support. In their very difficult time, the parents felt helpless, frustrated, abandoned.

5.3 Undermining the role and dignity of parents

In this theme, none of the ten parents reported being consulted before the removal of his or her child/children. The parents openly talked about their wishes and feelings regarding their service experiences and felt that they were not treated with respect as parents.

> *I was getting ready to leave (*to collect the child from school*), got a phone call from *******'s (child) mother that police has taken her from school…a day later I got a text from her that ***** is put with child safety…., At 3 o' clock I crossed the road to give a wave to *****(*child's name*), Child Safety spotted me, rang the police... the police hopped up…"how you going…want to talk to you….you are arrested"…I said on what ground…I was arrested for resisting arrest… locked me up for the night, released next day with a fine.*

Here is the account of another parent after losing her child into care having no prior consultation or preparation:

> *I felt like society is judging me...it does not know me, I felt like no self-esteem, no self-worth, I have been judged upon… for six weeks I was in mess…felt numb, felt lost, I was in the women's shelter, fighting for my daughter. I was screwed up; I was so stressed and homeless!*

Below are the experiences of parents who felt that their role as parents was undermined and never treated with dignity:

> *I never had a chance to show people how much of a good father I am, I know I am a good father….because I got a criminal history, because I am in the bottom of the ladder of life, because I am not part of the society, they do not take my claim seriously….it is that somebody put a gun to my head and pulled the trigger and killed the person many ways other than killing literally…. killing mentally, killing in the heart, have been killed in both ways.*

> *I reckon they should have come to me instead of removing my children, when they removed my daughter, as far as I knew they were taking her off from me when she was born. Child protection act says they must work with me before the child was born, they never did…therefore I believe they kidnapped my daughter when she was 7 days old.*

> *They (*case workers*) need to treat me as mother, need to understand (me) sensitively why people become upset. They need to be non-judgemental and respect people. They need to feel the impact on a mother when she loses children.*

The comments of the parents suggest their overall sense of pain, distress, invisibility and alienation from the service due to their experiences of being very poorly treated and judged with a punishing attitude in their extremely vulnerable situations, which they felt blocked any opportunity to show their potential strength as parents. The voices of the parents reflect their wishes to be included, be treated with the deserved dignity and sensitivity in assessing their situation and be supported before enforcing a protection order to remove children.

5.4 Practice and management issues and alienation of the families

Isolation was the experience reported by all the ten families in the event of initial child protection assessment and intervention.

Here is an account of a father who was trying to actively engage with the service while his child was initially brought into the care system:

> *I had to pursue on the department to increase contact and they as a result label me a serial complainer…eventually I got a letter from the director general (*of Child Safety*), ******** (*Name of city*), telling me, in future I will have no more contact with the department except once a month on Tuesday at 10 o' clock when (*if) *the team leader of the Child Safety Officer was available…. so, they cut me off and refused to have any contact with me.*

The comments of the father suggest his desperation to engage with the service but felt he was labelled and excluded by the bureaucracy.

Here is the account of another parent who also felt unjustly treated while she was trying to engage with the service through her critical scrutiny of the service:

> *The professionalism of Child Safety Officer is called into question, they are unable to separate their feelings about somebody questioning…they can't look at it objectively…they considered me just a trouble maker, they are trying to punish me, but at the same time they are punishing the children….a culture of covering their backs*

The next comment is about a parent's reflections on his experiences of being helpless and hopeless amidst significant personal health issues. The comment also outlines the parent's strength and potential to hold positive hope and insightfulness in a difficult situation.

> *To get the kids home again was my goal, but the way the department deal with it makes it so frustrating and almost impossible to see any light at the end of the tunnel… physically this has had tremendous effect on me as well, their pressure and also the distress as a chemical imbalance hypothyroidism…tremendously overweight*

In the intervention stage, the parent sought guidance regarding improving his parenting needs but there was no clear direction. The parent himself organised access to the *Triple P* parenting programme (Saunders, Markie-Dadds, Tully and Bor, 2000) while experiencing significant stress, frustration, depressive symptoms (which needed prescribed medication), which he attributed to his turning to risky coping mechanisms and to his hopelessness.

The comments of the families demonstrate their sense of detachment and distress due to the fact that their hopes and aspirations were ignored.

5.4.1 Alienation due to lack of empathy and support

This sub-theme reflected the families' experiences and critical opinions on different areas of the services following the statutory care interventions. In general, losing children into the care system can be a traumatic situation for many parents. During this critical time, it is important for parents to receive appropriate support to deal with the separation and losses, as well as rebuilding their lives with hope for future changes (Johnson and Sullivan, 2008).

The experiences of most parents (n=9) in this study about receiving support from the services were not very positive, which potentially impacted their views; nature of motivation; sense of trust about the service and also coping ability to manage their complex situations. Here is the account of a father:

> *I just lost the baby; lost my partner…I walk into the hell of a home…. our relationship ended not by our own choosing but by Docs (*CSS*)….. (*Now*) I have zero contact with my children, I have not seen ****** (*child's name*) since he was 9 months old, I have never laid eyes on my daughter (*became tearful*), forgive me if I am little bit emotional…. I have done enough crying, it just hits now and again.*

Here is the experience of a mother:

> *I never found any of these authorities to be helpful in any shape and form. They have their own agenda and they will do whatever they need to make their own end*

Another mother described her experience (without prior support) on the day of losing her children into care:

Docs (CPS) took the children away…..that was very confronting for me! That was very confronting for me!….I locked up self-harmed…...ended up in hospital

I feel like I am being treated in a domestic violence way, they are bossing me around, asking me to do things I can't do, then (they) backfiring me, keeping my children away from me and holding them as ransom

Three families described their expectations of support as practical support to improve and re-build the situations at home.

 One parent said:

 I expect them to assess the situation and (put) support in place, like someone can come home to help and get children to go to school…

A parent shared his experience how he is portrayed in the family court:

Dealing with the department is traumatic for me…..in the affidavit the department of Child Safety enlisted the psychologist (report) saying that I somehow manipulated my kids into this that I am essentially a "psychopath, highly manipulative, anti-social, all sorts of stuffs"….

Three parents described their difficult relationships with the system in the context of child protection services' consistent attempts to create division in the family relationships among partners and children. The comment of one of the parents reflects her perceptions:

They did not give me any opportunity, not supporting in family contact but putting pressure on me to separate from partner as fixing problem

The parents also talked about their expectation of family mediation assistance from the child protection services in the context of current and historical trauma and family relationship issues, which were not considered by the departments as support needs and the parents felt alienated.

In one particular case, the child protection services had closed the case due to the fact that the children were positively settling into kinship care. The parent stated that she, along with her partner, were reasonably changed persons, through their difficult journey and after receiving support, but there is no clarity now as to who can help them to get their children returned to their care.

The comments of the families reflect their disappointing help seeking experiences on several fronts due to lack of empathy and understanding of their real needs.

5.4.2 <u>Sense of mistreatment and alienation</u>

This subtheme presented the experiences of the families regarding the nature of the treatment they received. It was noted that almost all the parents (9 out of 10) reported their needs were not taken seriously and they were treated poorly by the CSS.

A father went to the Ombudsman when his advance request for support from the department was not positively addressed; later the department attributed the children's behavioural issues as his parenting concerns:

> *It is absolutely disgraceful…I contacted the Ombudsman and they say you need to go through the other channel first before we chased up for you….I am absolutely gobsmacked about how I am treated and how my children are treated…my daughter is absolutely out of control*

Another parent expressed her helplessness considering her exclusion from the assessment and intervention process:

> *The way I read on paper is not indicative of the person I am, which makes it very confronting to accept, huge decisions, fundamentally life changing decisions* (are) *made up by someone I did not even know*

> *Because I am not involved…I am kept out of the loop…I do not know until the decisions have been made…this is horrible, because you don't know what options are available*

A parent travelled significant distance to meet his children, which was reportedly not considered in the parenting assessment. Instead the parent was later made to go through a psychologist's assessment, which concluded him to be a *psychopath*:

> *I spoke to the guy may be for 15 minutes and did 176 multiple choice questionnaires…. weird questions…..”do I hear voices” …I am laughing at the questions… they basically saying that I am a psychopath, his (*psychologist*) recommendations is that children should be better at (*state*) care…utterly disgraceful*

A parent outlined his account of inconsistencies in child protection practices:

> *I went from being the criminal with a big picture on their wall, when everyone was scared of…then all of a sudden they've gone back, decided to put her back on my care...they stole 9 months from me*

The comments of another parent reflect his sense of discrimination as well as aspiration to be treated in fairness and respect:

> *Being male they targeted me as a monster......majority of the female CSO treat me with suspicion*

Another parent commented:

> *I think they (child protection services) need to decide what it is they do; to tell you the truth, you have one making comment to keep family together but what they say and what they do are two completely different things*

The parent's comments demonstrate her expectations for a clear and consistent practice approach.

The comments of the families reflect their account about the functioning of the child protection system, which they noted through the lens of their experiential mistreatments and inconsistent practice approaches in several areas. The experiences of the families reinforced their wishes to be treated with fairness, dignity and honesty.

5.4.3 Issues on communication, feedback, exclusion from decision making and alienation

The themes presented, demonstrate the families' perceptions about the nature and quality of interaction and communication with the child protection workers and the services in general.

Nine families described their interaction and communication with the child protection services as very poor with no trust or confidence in the system. The comments reflect the families' (some parents) experiences: *Don't trust……, no confidence…….., confusing…....,, disempowering……, … helpless…....*

One parent commented:

> *Not very much positive about feedback…disillusioned just how little information they give you how the procedure is going to go…every week I learned something new what's going to happen next.*

Another parent commented:

> *I am dealing with them for last 4 years…(*still*) don't know what they want, what they going to work*

The parents also outlined how their anxiety is reinforced by the uncertainty of not knowing about the wellbeing of their children in the traumatic event after losing children into care.

> *When they move her from *****(name of the town) to **********(name of the town) it took months to set up the phone contact to speak to brothers or me….it is disgraceful that they could not even set up the phone contact…its 21st century….it took them 8-9 months to organise counselling at ******(name of counselling centre) ...but I don't get any feedback*

> *They need to inform me about the progress of my children*

The parents talked about how their rights (to have information), roles and influence on children are being undermined and discounted in communication processes.

Another parent talked about how the Child Safety Services made the decision to apply for a protection order without seeing the child. The parent commented that the court appointed guardian of the child made the decision by talking to the child safety worker rather than talking to the parent or directly assessing the child:

> *It is horrible that people are making decision about me and my family without meeting me*

The comments of the families underline their sense of disempowerment amidst a lack of real support, reassuring interaction, feedback and a crucial information deficit. This lead to parents experiencing significant uncertainty and confusion about the process.

5.4.4 Issues around care plan and alienation

The sub-themes presented the families' views about the care plan in place and actual progress. The responses of the family members are quite cohesive. Here are the experiences of two parents:

A parent shared her account regarding inconsistency in care plan management:

> *In the original case plan, there was counselling involved and docs*(CSS) *were going to pay for private support but they never did anything (*that was*) in the case plan.*

A parent expressed her suspicion regarding the integrity of out of home care practice, which also reflects her lack of connection with the ongoing service:

> *I feel they are trying to keep the children with the foster carer, she can't go back to work next year she is at retirement age…she will have no income, they are trying to keep them (the children) so that she can retire*

However, some parents felt that they were offered support by the child protection services but after a period they realised it was not working for them and they disengaged and organised their own support. One parent commented:

> *I was working with Centacare then I decided not to work with Centacare anymore, they were not doing anything to help me*

The comments of the parents reflect their difficulties to connect with the services considering their profound lived experience of lacking confidence and hopelessness in the professional practice while also sensing discrimination, which all contributed to the risk of disengagement with the services.

Four parents stated that there was a care plan but it was never properly actioned, three parents stated there was no clarity in the care plan, one parent was confused regarding the state of the care plan and two parents acknowledged the existence of care plans which were actioned. There appears to be a mix of reactions regarding the parents' understanding and interpretations of care plans.

A father outlined his experiences:

> *The care plan ***** (*name of local child protection team*) did to deal with very very bad behaviour of the children…they funded my first session… then the CSO (*Child Safety Officer*) told me there wouldn't be any funding to do the course, I told her what do you want me to do….*

Another parent expressed frustration and alleged that child protection workers can make mistakes and punish the parents and don't do what they say, rather use children in a punishing way.

> *They are trained to do their job but they are not doing it until I went to their boss…if the government has got the right to take children away, I believe they should not have taken them away in the first place, they should be responsible for their action as we do…we are not allowed to make any mistake…..they claim to do all things but they don't…they are using my new born baby as a guinea pig.*

A parent described her confusion and contradiction about the care plan due to a lack of communication and coordination among the child protection professionals:

> *I received conflicting directions. The workers have no power to make decision. They (*the case workers*) are not complying with the original plan of organising counselling for the children. They are making decision about me without meeting me or giving me the opportunity. They do not clarify their concerns they are not honest.*

Here is a significant question raised by parents whether the children's views are represented in professional decision making:

> *They say they listen to the children, they don't because if they listen to the children, once you dealt with them like this one (pointing to her daughter) she hates child safety, says, she will run away from them, how sad is that! She supposed to be safe with them.*

> *…Leading up to the final court case, I wanted her (child) voice to be heard…. but she did not have a chance…it was disempowering experience*

A parent expressed her confusion and anxiety as the child protection case worker could not clarify and guide her with certainty regarding the parenting courses she and her partner have attended on their own initiative:

> *My partner did anger management, 123 magic, Hey Dad…I have done 123 magic and now I have applied parenting under 12 and stress management. I go to church and I also go to Bible study for young mothers. All the courses me and my partner are doing they are acknowledging but not telling us what courses we (*actually*) need to do… they just put the courses on their paper work.*

The parents articulated their experiences of the actual implementation of the care plan in a very negative light. They raised questions of the services' sincerity while witnessing factual errors, conflicting directions, isolating the views of the children, which all mirrored not simply the frontline practitioners but the management leading the practice.

5.4.5 Organisational disruption and alienation

The parents also raised concerns regarding the quality of basic practice of the system in light of frequent changes of workers.

One parent talked about his struggle to deal with frequent change of workers and managers causing significant stress and confusion:

> *Frequent turnover of staff in the department was shocking I had 8 CSO, 16 leaders (team leaders), 3 managers in probably 13 months… its infuriating, got to rehearse whole case (to the new workers).*

Another parent shared his inner thoughts about workers in the service:

> *Most department workers working a number of years are cold, distant (*then*) they become de-sensitised. Anyone who becomes compassionate and genuinely caring, very very passionate, like social workers background don't stay on in the job for long because it taking a toll on them and the cold, callus hearts stay on.*

The families' insight regarding frequent changes of staff members in the child protection system demonstrates not only their anxiety and frustration but their expectations of consistency and stability in the system.

The comments of the parents suggest their lack of confidence in the operational functioning and integrity of the service amidst a sense of fear of unfair treatment and rejection with negative emotional consequences for the struggling families.

5.5 Powerful position of child safety and comparative weakness of legal aid

This theme presented the families' sense of disempowerment considering available legal support services to defend their cases.

Four families talked about legal supports as something they were looking for as support. However, three families mentioned their difficulties in accessing the credible legal support that could strongly advocate their case in the court of law. Here are experiences of two parents:

> *I would rather go to court myself… the Legal Aid lawyer told me, ****(name of the parent) work with these people(CPS), follow the process, you will be alright. I said no! You are my lawyer…I want her (daughter) back…..if I would listen to everyone she should still be in care*

> *Legal Aid and Women's Aid are too scared to challenge child protection due to losing funding; you have to hire a private solicitor. if you are poor you don't feel that at all…... If you have no money, you will walk away with a 2-year order.*

A parent held the current legal system (i.e. child protection legislation) accountable in light of practice concerns:

> *They are not interested in parents' wellbeing because parents are enemy because of the adversarial system*

A parent who reportedly took a bank loan against his property to hire his choice of a competent solicitor and successfully secured custody of his child, expressed sympathy and concerns for families fully relying on the Legal Aid support:

> *That's why I feel upset…the people who live in housing commission houses, they have no chance, it's not equal*

A father articulated his insight about the issues and alleged there is a problem in the structure of the child protection legal system:

> *I think it is the adversarial legal system…when you go to the children' court, it is adversarial, there is conflict…one side must win… there is no allowance for a win win situation*

In terms of legal support to assist families for future care, a father appeared very discouraged by the contradiction regarding actual quality of support available through free legal aid services:

> *Legal Aid, in my experience, are over worked, very young, not experienced….they do not take initiative…we are getting email of a lady (*who*) employed an expensive lawyer and got her baby back.*

Another parent shared her experience regarding inconsistency in the legal aid support process and she is advising parents to be cautious about seeking legal aid support:

> *I tell parents if you are clear in your heart, if you did the right things, look at the mirror (*if*) you did nothing wrong, you fight for your kids…I advocate that*

The comments of the families' reflected their very complex relationships with the CPS. They perceived the CPS are not only more powerful but unchallengeable. While it can be acknowledged that exercising the legal authority and power of CPS can be very dependent upon particular magistrate, the comments of the parents highlight the generic powerful position of CPS and the comparative weakness of legal aid systems that encourage compliance instead of challenge. The families are in a constant search for competent assistance under the state funded legal support services, which they don't believe they are getting. However, when they could not find dependable professional support, they attempted to stand up for their own rights and tried to support and encourage each other in a very difficult circumstances. So, it's all about the the families' perceptions regarding their relationships with the CPS, their sense of disempowerment and desire to be connected with the mainstream resources and be supported to improve their situations.

5.6 Issues around contact arrangements

This theme presented the families' experiences, wishes and feelings regarding parental and sibling contact arrangements.

The responses of the families regarding family contact arrangements with children living in the care system were quite varied and in-depth. The narratives of the families reflect diverse complex experiences and phenomena in the process of contact arrangements. The specific concerns raised by the participant families have been outlined under sub themes:

5.6.1 Undermining family contact

Two families overtly talked about how the value of family contact was undermined. A father shared his experience of undermining parental contact, particularly on special family occasions like father's birthday, with his daughter in foster care:

> *The department would say this is for the child's benefit to have an enjoyable weekend (*to attend a barbeque with the foster care families*) rather than contact with you (*father*)*

Another parent, whose child died followed by the removal of other children, expressed his deeply distressful feelings (in his own language terms) by equalising the pain of not seeing his children (currently living out of his care) with the pain of losing the child to death. The parent also expressed his frustration regarding issues around family contact arrangements, which reflect the parent's advocacy regarding the significant emotional values of family contacts:

> *I may have lost a son to death but I have got children lost to death just as much as that still alive today, I never seen them.....I want them (*child protection workers*) to feel what I felt, I want them to go through hell like I did, I want them to stop seeing children, and feel loved no more, want to feel cold? Come into my life, I will show you cold!*

Another parent felt that even though their children are living in kinship care, the contact with parents will still be very important for the wellbeing of both children and parents:

> *The children are very very angry at the department…they are not happy that they are able to see their mother for an hour once a week.*

A mother felt that the children's refusal to have contact with significant family members like their parents should not be taken as a deciding point as there is the likelihood that the children

are negatively influenced and misguided about their parents, which is not good for either the child or the parent:

> *People letting my 9 years old to make decision…every time I ask (*him to visit mum's house*) he says grandma says it's not safe….so you know they are trying to make out we* as *big monster*

Another parent expressed concerns regarding attempts to detach children from birth families:

> *The boys calling foster parents mum and dad…. gives them false illusion of false family, nobody can take role of their biological parents*

The comments of the parents reflect their pain and helplessness in the process of family contact arrangements in which they felt excluded and disempowered.

5.6.2 Undermining sibling contacts

Five families have strongly advocated for the regular contact of siblings while they are living in the care system. The families felt that living in out-of-home care is a very complex isolative situation and the building up of regular communication and relationships through contact is very re-assuring and is good for the children's social and emotional wellbeing. One parent expressed her concerns not only about the negative impact of poor contact arrangements but the wider impact of care on children:

> *The children are ripped away from the family, ripped away from their brothers and into completely different routine and then when they come home they have to get used with each other all over again, and family services do not see this as a detrimental effect…it is!*

> *A grandmother commented:*

> *I am not happy they (*siblings*) are in separate placement; I think they should be together*

The comments of the families reinforced their voices not to separate children in care arrangements.

5.6.3 <u>Issues around prioritising needs of children</u>

The subtheme reflects further issues around contact arrangements. Three families talked about issues around family contact arrangements lacking appropriate planning and consideration. One parent talked about his distress during contact with his 3 children who had different complex emotional needs and the challenges of responding to the individual demands of the children during contact. The father shared his helplessness:

> *I drive 500 kilometres to see my kids for 90 minutes per week. They all want my attention and it was terrible… I could not do that…they all want me to be individually…I alienated my kids from each other.*

Three parents talked about their concerns regarding the process of contact arrangements without reasonable clarity.

A parent commented:

> *I have to phone them to confirm contact. I have to phone them to see what decision have been made or what directions they are heading in, that ended up two different versions, no two people have the same sense what's going on within the department*

One parent stated that contacts are arranged in a public park which compromised privacy as well as quality time opportunity between parents and children as well as among siblings.

Three parents talked about contacts being stopped because of ongoing investigations and in one case, even after the parent was cleared of the allegation. One of the parents shared his feelings and frustration in terms of justice and fairness issues in contact arrangements:

> *Country says we have human rights, we have justice, we have equal opportunities…. where is my equal opportunity to defend (*my rights*)?.... Where is the fair go? I should be innocent until (proven) guilty…at the end of the day truth will rule…too many victims, just can't be hidden….*

The comments of the families demonstrate their struggle to make sense of the quality of child protection practice in family contact management while undermining the value of family contacts in light of fairness, practical factors and general priorities and its negative impact on the families and children. The parents' expressed voices and advocacy reflect their insightfulness and awareness as their strength and potential for future change.

5.7 Issues on out of home care arrangements

This theme presented the families' talking about their experiences regarding the social and emotional wellbeing of their children while living in the statutory care system.

5.7.1 Abuse and neglect in care

Eight parents talked about their experience of the lack of quality of basic care in terms of safety and emotional wellbeing of their children. Here is the account of a distressed father:

> *My daughter, since she is in care, she is no longer virgin, has substance abuse problem, drink problem, smoking cigarette constantly, in visit* (family contact*), I say, honey! What are you doing you are just 12 years old…* (parent became upset with tears)*...I am just stressed all the time, that's why sniffing, that's why huffing, that's why smoke dope, that's why I drink…. for a while I forget*

One parent said that in spite of living in kinship care children are not going well:

> *They are always dirty, head just full of nits, my daughter nearly 4 still wears nappy even after the paediatrician told the foster carer to get her out of nappies, so she has bad nappy rash, still coming to contact with a nappy…she* (carer) *yells at them, drag them around*

Here are the voices of a parent:

> *The children are split up, 4 in foster care; 14-year-old is in residential care, is wandering around where she likes to......she (*mum*) does not know what is happening, they (Child Safety) are not telling her anything*

One grandparent's comments reflect the narrative of her story:

> *When the 12 year old made disclosure of sexual abuse in the foster home, they changed the placement and when my daughter* (mother of the child) *enquired about investigation they said "nothing will happen"…..I am very angry and powerless, should be jumping up and down…what you do it goes against you!*

The grandmother seemed frustrated and felt helpless as contact among the siblings was not organised while separated in different placements. The parent felt very disempowered and helpless that she couldn't do anything regarding the divisive care arrangements of her two children. The comment also shows the mother's sense of alienation from the child protection services intervention.

In another instance a grandparent commented:

> *I am feeling powerless and angry. The children were damaged due to several placement changes and difficulties in care. Instead of removal of the children they could help us. Removal of children devastated my daughter and impacted on her recovery from substance misuse, it also caused strain in our mother-daughter* (grandmother and mother's) *relationship*

Another parent shared experiences of abuse in foster care:

> *Foster carer was abusive…if they* (children) *do something at home, she would say no school lunch only one dry wheat-bix, another occasion she punished them by making them walk other side of the street in July cold at night and take away their teddy bear…*

The parents' sense of disempowerment and aspiration for appropriate family support in pre-intervention stage has been reflected through the comments.

Seven families outlined their grave concerns regarding the deteriorating wellbeing of their children while living in the foster care system. A parent stated that one of his children had developed very negative self-harming behaviour like taking drugs, engaging in juvenile delinquency, sexual promiscuity and is now homeless. Here are the comments of two parents:

> *The 13 years old wandering in the street of* ********** (name of the town) *as we speak, not going to school for 2 years, taking drugs, has sexually transmitted disease.*

> *I think the department did not understand how behaviourally bad the children were ….my kids gone through hell in care….*

The parent's comments reflect an example of significant vulnerability in statutory care in terms of safety, boundary setting and, social and emotional wellbeing management.

A parent raised questions regarding the quality of care experience, which caused her grandchildren to abscond from the care arrangement:

> *The three girls were together in the kinship care and then something happened in the placement that caused them to run away together….*

Another parent reflected his experience:

> *I was horrified at what my daughter was exposed to in residential placement…a teenage girl screaming with unbelievable profound voice "get off the phone you*

fu***** sl**" …my daughter was an 11-year-old kid and should not be exposed to such. 15-16-year-old kids taking dope, stealing cars, have sex that sort of stuff…later my daughter was arrested for setting fire in the house…couple of weeks later the department phoned me to tell she was raped by a 15-year-old boy

The father's account reflects his profound sense of concern about ongoing safety and emotional wellbeing of his daughter considering quality of care arrangements.

5.7.2 Inconsistency in care arrangements and further risks of placement breakdown

The subtheme presented the impact of unplanned placement arrangements and associated risks to placement stability.

Five parents identified how changes in placement have caused significant negative impact on their children's wellbeing. One parent talked about his children being subjected to multiple placement changes and one of the children experiencing 40 different placements moves. The father referred to the adolescent's comments:

When I speak to her she would be crying, "dad I want to come home" …honey you can't come home …...my daughter is scared. She is worse now…4 times worse now…. now she is out of control

Here is the account of a parent who struggled to access support following removal of a child from family amidst significant instability in organising placement:

It took 7 months to organise the counselling but they could not find proper placement…. 3 different carers … 3 days here and 3 days there… then they find a placement odd 223 kilometres away, then the department moved her in a youth accommodation, then I heard they put her on a plane heading for *****(name of the place) but later that placement broke down then they moved her ******(name of the place) ….

A grandmother expressed her concerns:

They took the girls from school, put them with complete strangers, that was with a different culture…

The father asked for investigations about the reasons of placement breakdown rather than just moving children from one place to another:

My daughter had 30 placement breakdowns, each time a placement breakdown they don't investigate, just move her to another placement...just keep moving her along.

The experiences of the families highlight their perception of profound issues with the child protection practice and policy that impact upon the out of home care system and placement breakdowns, causing significant disruption to the already traumatised children. It offers a nuanced understanding regarding the families' lived experiential issues around quality of care arrangements in light of basic care; safety and boundaries, which all are generally aligned to frontline practice and leadership in the system. The lived experiences also raised their concerns regarding safety and emotional environmental issues in foster and residential care and protecting and prioritising children's needs in the event of statutory investigations. So, the voices not just outline the leadership and practice issues but its wider impact upon the out of home care system, which can also be seen as unfolding the disconnection between child protection policy and practice.

5.8 What parents want?

This theme presented the families' expectations from child protection services. The responses seem quite cohesive while they articulate their wishes and feelings.

Ten family members felt that the child protection workers should be open, honest and consistent about sharing their concerns. Here are the comments of one parent:

They need to be honest, tell the family the actual concerns, be consistent with their approach, transparent, and focus on family and not just on children, improving relations among siblings and have better coordination among professionals.

Another parent outlined her hope that children should not be evicted from their natural environment rather than taking the risk factors out of the scene:

Why not take my husband (alleged perpetrator) *away and leave the children at home so that they are not traumatised, put support in place...taking away from parent so traumatic so much damage…feelings of children towards their parent are not considered either*

Six parents strongly advocated for supporting and ensuring their participation in the assessment and intervention process through an inclusive practice approach. The comments of the families reflect their critiques and aspirations:

> *They* (child protection services) *needed to include me and talked to me when they had concerns about my parenting ability. They took my youngest child who was 7 days old. I felt I might have killed somebody…..discriminated and disempowered.*

A parent articulated her thoughts considering the lack of application of policy and procedures:

> *They* (child protection workers) *don't follow the policy and procedures, I know they don't…. if they did, they would listen to mum and dad, and listen to the kids….*

The voices reflect their aspirations to be included and have reasonable control access in the intervention process.

One parent reflected her sense of exclusion driven by helplessness and fear about the service, which also demonstrates her expectation for a safe, supportive and collaborative service:

> *I still feel like I can't discipline my children properly, I feel scared that if I discipline, they* (child safety services) *are going to ring and go again, you lose self-confidence, I have flashback how I was treated…that's not right*

A parent reflected his sense of discrimination and wishes for a de-stigmatised and inclusive service:

> *We were stereotyped in a sense of old men are animals and dangerous to society*

Two parents advocated for transparency and an independent investigation regarding conduct of the system, which can be seen as their agendas for creating space for inclusiveness:

> *I think very strongly there needs to be a completely independent complaints department, somewhere about playing at the action of the Child Safety Officer, and the complaint will be assessed and investigated completely independent. Because the department does have complaint section but I know from experience, when you complain they go straight to the officer with their side of the stories of complete disbelieve*

> *If the doctors can be challenged in an independent system, why the child protection services should not be.*

Another parent shared his thoughts of fear considering how his voices were discredited and demonised and thereby felt alienated:

> *The Department of Child Safety is not high think of, somewhat to be feared…. when I have raised issues, and concerns I certainly have been dealt with hostility and vindictive responses*

The families seemed keen to see a service which they can trust and has a positive public reputation. A parent cited an example from his account of the Swedish child protection services' public reputation and advocated through the example that "if this is possible in Sweden then why not in this country":

> *In Sweden, when child safety people knocking on the door they are welcomed with a cup of tea. In Queensland, when Child Safety people knocking the door, people look behind the clips* (? Possibly meant door hole) *and runaway* (through) *the backdoor, completely different attitude than child safety in Sweden, the judicial system is not adversarial in Sweden, the focus is on the child in the family, here the focus is the child; a forensic approach. In Sweden, it is the family approach, they are working with the family……* (here in QLD) *they are not interested in parents' wellbeing, because parents are enemy, because of the adversarial system*

The comments of the families reflected their diverse complex experiences with the service on different fronts that articulated windows into the expectations and hopes what they wished happened. Through their experiential lens the parents highlighted broader practice and operational issues in inculcating inclusion of parents, transparency and hope and building the public reputation of the service.

5.9 Broader themes from the findings

As in Dumbrill (2006)'s study, the ways parents experienced child protection workers treating them primarily shaped their perceptions about the services. Ghaffar et al. (2012) noted that considering the sense of service experience (i.e. empowerment or disempowerment), empowerment can still be the process and outcome for the future shape of service, which the families can trust and rely on for addressing their development needs. At the outset of the analysis process, the families have aligned their experiences with the outcome of child protection services while scrutinising the quality of service that affected their lives. The voices of the families also reflected their sense of logic or wisdom regarding the future shape of the service considering how they would like to be treated and supported.

So, the families' practical experiences, critiques and their reflective judgements inform their arguments for their empowerment in the future service they imagine from the child protection services. The process of analysis and identification of the significant components from the findings were guided by the critical theoretical process. Accordingly, the themes and subthemes (i.e. as emerged from the findings) were further analysed and deducted against critiques offered by the families in terms of critical scrutiny and reflective judgements, through

reasoning and aspirations about (future) service, which all consolidated into the broader themes. The similar approach was followed in the synthesis process, to identify commonalities and differences in the literature and link these with the identified different themes: alienation issues; practice issues and management issues.

5.10 The core categories of themes as identified

Table 3: The core categories of themes as inferred from broader themes of the findings

Broader themes from the findings	Core categories of themes as inferred from the broader themes		
	Alienation issues	Practice issues	Management issues
Ignoring and undermining the families' openness to engage with the service. Parents felt unsupported and humiliated. Issues around lack of professional values and ethics and alienation of the families.	Feelings of being ignored, undermined and humiliated	Lack of professional values and ethics in acknowledging and encouraging clients' strength and building inclusive practice	Concerns around service development in building value based practice competency and compatibility skills in gracefully engaging the families with the service
Missed opportunities before, during and after intervention. Lack of assessing initial needs and adequate practical support. The families felt helpless, frustrated and abandoned.	Frustration, helplessness and sense of abandonment	Basic practice issues in assessment of needs, engagement with the families and organising appropriate support on time	Issues around building practice competency in comprehensive assessment of needs in facilitating appropriate support on time through respectful involvement with the families
Undermining roles and dignities of parents. Parents' sense of pain, distress, invisibility, being poorly treated and judged and alienated, which restricted their opportunities to show potential strength as parents.	Feelings of indignity, pain, distress, invisibility, poor treatment, lack of empathy and being judged	Competency issue in treating clients with respect, dignity and empathy	Issues in building competent and emotionally skilled workforce to connect with the families by treating them with respect and dignity in nurturing their potential through empowerment activities
Practice management issues and alienation: Isolating and ignoring parents' crucial views, lack of empathy and mistreatment, poor communication and interaction, lack of support and frequent staff changes, which all contributed to alienation of the families from service.	Sense of de-valuing of (families') expertise and wellbeing needs; confusion and disconnection amidst poor communication and staff changes	Practice issues in building respectful partnership, comprehensive parenting assessment and communication	Issues in building service with appropriate practice development in enhancing smooth communication and guidance, integrating the families with the service through respectful partnership, clarity and retention of staff
Powerful position of Child Safety and comparative weakness in legal support system that encourage compliance instead of challenge. It also reflects the families' desperation for legal aid support, which they can trust to help them.	Sense of powerlessness, hopelessness, anxiety and frustration amidst not having trust worthy service and supports	Attitude and insight issue about power-relation dynamics and skills in managing clients' needs and potential	Issues in building staff competency in acknowledging and dealing with power imbalances, creating adequate practical support and empowerment opportunities for the families

Issues around family contact arrangement amidst undermining the value of family contacts, sibling contacts in light of fairness, practical factors and priorities and its negative impact on the families and children.	Sense of separation and loss (due to lack of adequate and timely contacts), confusion, fear and disempowerment	Practice concerns on appropriate insightfulness, skills and expertise in planning, coordinating and managing family contacts informed by the wishes and practical factors of the families	Issues around ongoing support needs for practice competency development amidst achieving emotional compatibility to engage and protect the children and parents from separation and alienation through effective implementation of care plan
What the families want? The families reflected their diverse complex experiences with the service on different fronts that articulated windows into the expectations and hopes that they wished happened. Through their experiential lens the parents highlighted broader practice and operational issues in inculcating, inclusion of parents; transparent practice and building a public reputation of the service.	Hopelessness in light of lack of transparency in service, sense of exclusion and poor public reputation of the service, which further validates reasons for alienation	Issues around professional competency in building transparent and inclusive practice that enhance public confidence in the integrity of the service	Issues around empowering the workforce in building transparent and inclusive practice that enhance public confidence in the integrity of the service amidst achieving emotional compatibility to engage and protect the children and parents from alienation
Outcomes from broader themes of the findings	Sense of being ignored, humiliated, helpless, anxious, feared, excluded and disempowered	Practice issues on ethical values, competency and engagement with families in building effective partnership, assessment and intervention to facilitate safe care and empowerment of the families	Need for developing workforce and adequate ongoing support networks on ethical value based practice and competency building to connect and empower the families

As discussed in Chapter 3, the essence of qualitative research lies in the humanistic tradition that people are the creators of their own "subjective realities," and understanding of these can set the scene for insightful, empathetic and relationally based practice (Bunting et al., 2015 p.2). This qualitative analysis process has aimed at exploring the families' subjective realities, which they created through their experiential evidences, critical reflections and aspirations. The broader themes from the primary data present a nuance account of their service experiences, as well as scope for future service development as informed by the families, which all consolidated into the core categories of themes as the basis for their empowerment.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter presented the primary data as analysed through the critical social theory based process. It revealed the ways parents practically experienced child protection workers treating them, which articulated their critical perceptions about the services and reflective judgement on rights and desire for future service needs. In general, the experiences of the families with the CPS reflect a deep sense of disempowerment, which potentially contributed to their alienation from the services. The broader themes as synthesised from the findings, reflect not just the families' diverse socio-emotional, legal and practical difficulties but a sense of inherent hope for future change, which all have been analysed and located into the three core categories of themes, alienation issues; practice issues and management issues. The identified core themes are analytically viewed and mapped in the next chapter through the ICET (Integrated Construct of Empowerment Theories) lens as developed earlier (Chapter 4, Figure 2) to interpret the families' voices about ways forward to achieve empowerment.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter builds on analysis and mapping the core categories of themes (Table 3) from findings through the integrated construct of empowerment theories (ICET) lens (Figure 2), which is now incorporated with the core themes (Figure 2a) for the purpose of the mapping process. The core categories of themes have been analysed and mapped against the empowerment lens, Integrated Construct of Empowerment Theory (ICET) (Figure 2). As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2) and methodology chapter (Chapter 3), building on the research literature in the last 10 years, this study aimed to approach the experiences of the families in an empowerment framework to showcase the voices through critique and suggestions about the service they receive and scope for future service development. The mapping outcomes of the themes are discussed in the context of literature. The chapter also reflects on the contribution of this research in view of previous work in this area.

6.1 Setting the scene for discussion

The purpose of the research was to promote understanding of the views and experiences of families with the public child protection system by using empowerment framework as a lens for deeper exploration and mapping of the key themes of findings in articulating way forwards informed by the families.

The findings highlight the stress, disempowerment and alienation experienced by the families at all levels of child protection interventions, which were complicated by the images of the frontline workers as powerful, and able to support and make decisions. However, in reality they were not always able, and at times over reactive, inconsistent in communication amidst frequent and unplanned changes in the work force. The families talked about their difficulties to engage with the service due to the experiences of humiliation, fear; being ignored etc., which were further compounded due to lack of trust on the system and associated uncertainty about what's going on or going to happen in the significant areas like out of home care, assessment, interventions and legal processes. The findings also highlight their lived experiences of helplessness of not knowing their rights and who they can trust for dependable help. These findings are reinforced by the previous research (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2010; Ghaffar et al., 2012; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Dumbrill, 2006; Platt, 2008; Ivec et al., 2012; Bunting et al., 2015 etc.), which

articulated a vision for a service under relationally based family empowerment focused practice agenda. Building on the previous research, this study built the arguments by mapping the broader themes of findings against meta-synthesis of empowerment literature, which identified the disempowering nature of the child protection system in the domains of leadership and operation; team building and frontline practice. These outcomes are discussed in this chapter in light of literature and diagrams to articulate how these are making sense for a new way of thinking and building the arguments for change in the system to reinforce consistency between policy and practice embedded in family empowerment.

6.2 Analysis and mapping the findings through empowerment lens

In light of the previous work undertaken with limited data (for example, Ghaffar et al., 2012; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014 etc.), this study also does not make any claim that the views of the participating families in this research are representative of the families involved with the public child protection services. However, it is suggested that the range of views, critiques and aspirations of the participating families based on their lived experiences with the services, are likely to be shared by the families having experiences of involvement with the public child protection services (Ghaffar et al., 2012). The participating families seemed to welcome the opportunity to reflect on their very sensitive personal experiences in their private space. Even though many of them found it difficult to revisit their complex past, but they expressed hope that their experiences could improve the service for other families.

In recapitulating the discussions in the previous chapters, this study, on re-visioning child protection practice embedded in family empowerment is built on previous research, which noted the alienation of families due to diverse practice and management issue. Such research, by Bunting et al. (2015) advocated for relationally based practice as opposed to procedural practice, informed by the families, and recognising families as natural carers and individuals in their own right. This study has engaged in an in-depth qualitative enquiry with a cohort of families on their experiences with public child protection services. The process of analysis of the primary data involved several stages theoretical process followed by the development of core categories of themes as thematic transcripts (themes and sub-themes). In seeking to explore more nuanced understandings of how the participant families experience and interpret their interactions and empowerment aspirations, the emerging core themes from the findings are analysed and mapped through an empowerment lens - the integrated construct of empowerment theories (ICET) as developed against meta-synthesis of empowerment literature in Chapter 4.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the ICET (Figure 2) lens, has located three fundamental stages of empowerment: tier 1 in individual (professional) capacity building domain; tier 2 in group capacity

building domain and tier 3 in systemic capacity building domain. The clarity regarding the chronological process of the domains (i.e. whether the empowerment process can progress from top to bottom or bottom to top) on the identified domains has been discussed in Chapter 4. In organising the mapping process, the core categories of themes have been presented on the identified corresponding matching domains of the ICET.

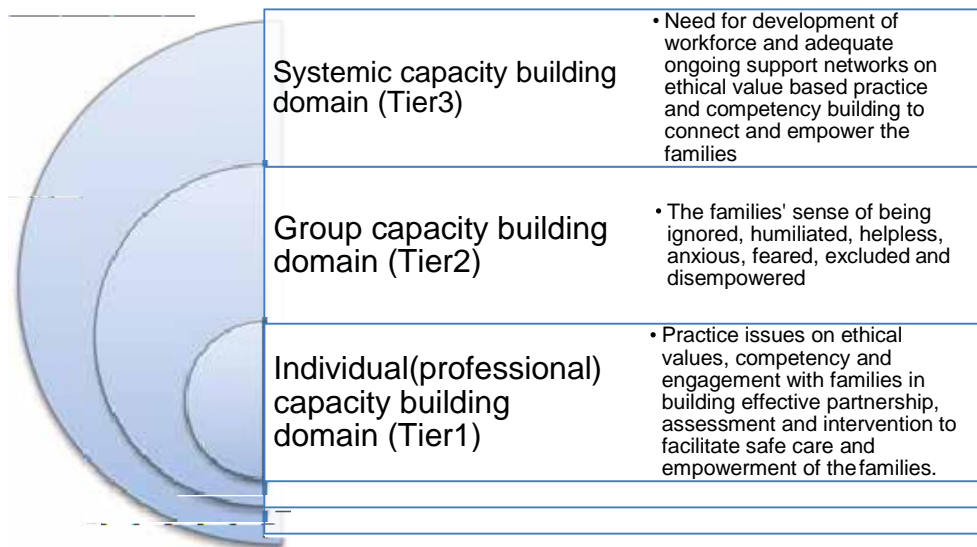| Systemic capacity building domain (Tier3) | • Need for development of workforce and adequate ongoing support networks on ethical value based practice and competency building to connect and empower the families |
| Group capacity building domain (Tier2) | • The families' sense of being ignored, humiliated, helpless, anxious, feared, excluded and disempowered |
| Individual(professional) capacity building domain (Tier1) | • Practice issues on ethical values, competency and engagement with families in building effective partnership, assessment and intervention to facilitate safe care and empowerment of the families. |

Figure 2a: ICET Lens as incorporated with the core categories of themes

6.2.1 Mapping the experiences of the families through the ICET lens

A qualitative concept map strategy has been used to systematically present the various concept meanings embedded in the empowerment framework of propositions (Brightman, 2003; Daley, 2004). The process has structured and organised the mapping process, linking between the theoretical concepts (ICET), core categories of themes and the outcome map. The analyses and mapping process was driven by understanding the significant features of the experiences and aspirations of the families under the empowerment focused stage process, also in consolidating strategic meanings and mapping the outcomes at the individual, group and systemic level. The core categories of themes are placed in each domain of the ICET framework, based on the corresponding nature and objectives of the specific stage informed by a qualitative concept map strategy.

Process of analysis and mapping of the core themes from the primary data

ICET Lens: Stages of capacity building process	Analytical viewing through ICET Lens	Experiences of the families with the child protection services: The core categories of themes	Empowerment under stage process	Outcome on empowerment: A comprehensive stage process as identified by the families	Mapping through ICET Lens under stage process	Outcome on empowerment: Stage process as identified by the families
Capacity building components in the systemic domain: Tier 3	Analytical viewing through ICET Lens	Need for development of workforce and adequate ongoing support networks on ethical value based practice and competency building to connect and empower the families	Empowerment in systemic domain	Need for development of organisational and social care governance (Gloucestershire County Council, 2011) in building frontline workforce, practice frameworks, training and staff development to facilitate effective engagement and partnership with the families for the best outcome for children and parents	Empowerment in specific systemic domain	Operational and leadership development of the system
Capacity building components in the group domain: Tier 2	Analytical viewing through ICET Lens	Sense of being ignored, humiliated, helpless, anxious, feared, excluded and disempowered	Empowerment in group domain	Need for building human relation condition (Diaz, 2015) in the work environment. Team work building through group capacity development under a sense of belonging, mutual empathy, safety, support, connectivity in a respectful and safe environment, which will be replicated in the staff's professional skills, values and behaviour in creating safe and supportive environment for the vulnerable families to nurture their potentials.	Empowerment in specific group domain	Team building and compatibility development of the workers.
Capacity building components in the individual (professional) domain: Tier 1	Analytical viewing through ICET Lens	Practice issues on ethical values, competency and engagement with families in building effective partnership, assessment and intervention to facilitate safe care and empowerment of the families	Empowerment in individual (professional) domain	Need for building appropriate professional skills and competence required for high standard child protection assessment and intervention. Facilitating transparent and multilateral flow of communication between case worker, management and families in an environment of safe feedback policy, supportive follow up and development.	Empowerment in specific individual (professional)domain	Professional competency development of frontline case workers.

Table 4: Analysis and mapping of primary data through ICET lens

6.3 Empowerment concept map informed by the families

The ICET mapping outcome is presented here in a combined form encompassing the primary data as analysed and managed by the critical theoretical process, which all contributed to the empowerment concept map reflected through the voices of the families:
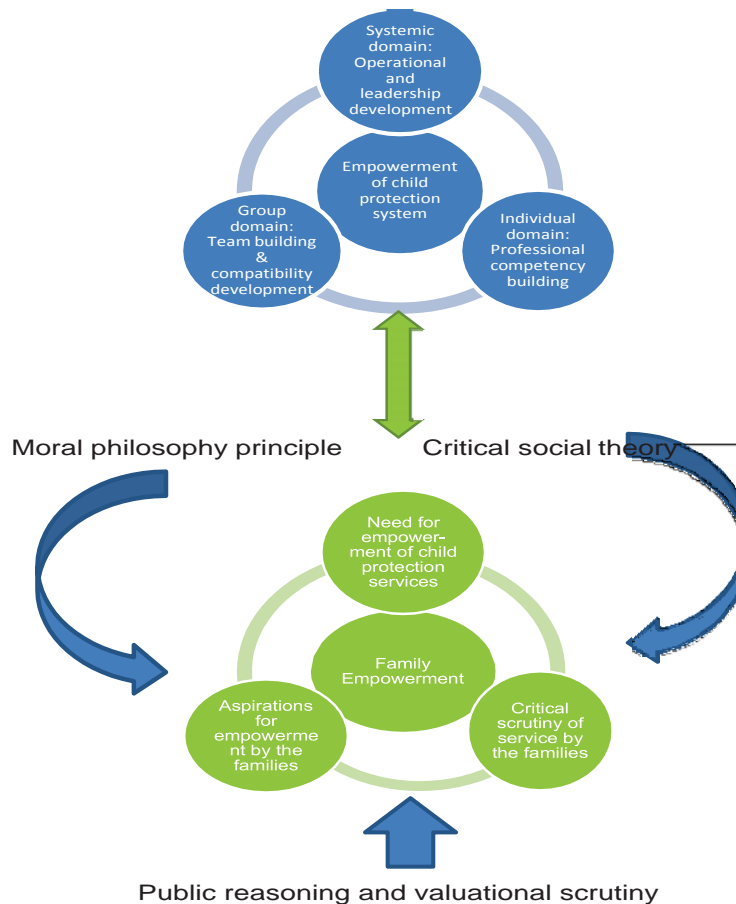

Fig 3: Family informed pathways of empowerment under ICET staged process

The ICET mapping process has shaped and structured the families' views including aspirations for empowerment, which suggest how the process of their empowerment is linked to service development. The ICET stage process has identified an intrinsic link between the families' critiques and aspirations for better service (to facilitate their empowerment) and the scope for building the child protection services. The integration process of the three components has progressed in an inter-dependent context.

The Figure 3 outlines the family informed pathways of empowerment under an ICET staged process, which facilitated and analytically shaped the emerging propositions of the families to a different level. This has created an opportunity for the empowerment of the child protection

system as a link to family empowerment. The ICET lens has located the processes and domains to empower the child protection system.

6.4 The aspirations of the families: Pathways of empowerment in staged process

The voices of the families, as mapped out against meta-synthesis of empowerment literature (ICET), have increased our understanding of the families' inner views on their experiences and the process of their empowerment. The ICET mapping has located the voices of the families in a three-dimensional capacity building domain (systemic, group and individual) that facilitates their empowerment. Each of the staged domains is unique in terms of nature, scope and boundaries for development.

Here are the capacity building domains, which reiterate the core categories of themes as they emerged. The analysis process has progressed in the context of the literature relating to the families' perspectives.

6.4.1 Systemic capacity building domain

The systemic domain outlines the operational development and social care governance aspects of the child protection system, which is permeated by a statutory model of care taking into consideration all aspects of organizational development. This is outlined in the social care governance framework of Gloucestershire County Council (2011 p. 2):

> Social Care Governance is a framework for making sure that social care services provide excellent ethical standards of service and continue to improve them. Our values, behaviours, decisions and processes are open to scrutiny as we develop safe and effective evidence-based practice. Good governance means that we recognise our accountability, we act on lessons learned and we are honest and open in seeing the best possible outcomes and results for people.

These points are also outlined in the mapping of the core categories of themes in terms of building a frontline practice framework, training and staff development of the workforce to facilitate effective engagement and partnership evidenced by the lived experiences (Bunting et al., 2015) of the families. The necessity of building a competent workforce through organisational development is also supported by a wealth of other literature. For example, D'Cruz and Gillingham, (2014) acknowledged the significant needs for building capacity of child protection services to protect the families from practical and relationship repercussions in their lives in relation to their involvement with the service, which they described as the "Domino effect". Ghaffar et.al. (2012) advocated for effective service framework development

through partnerships and by taking into consideration the feedback of the families in building future service development. Harris (2012) made a compelling argument for a review of current child protection models due to concerns of "alienating and confusing" the families under the current procedural model of service. In this study the families' concerns about the organisational matters linking the quality of service delivery by the frontline staff have reiterated the specific core issues (i.e. themes) as well as scope for their empowerment. The families have voiced a preference for ethical value driven professional practice that can deliver reliable and fair services which they can trust. When the parents experienced exclusion in the crucial decision making about their families and children were not communicated about important processes (e.g. legal, care plan, out of home placement, contacts, wellbeing of children in care etc.) they discovered reasons not to engage with the service, which can make things harder for the practitioners to reconnect with the families. These issues are also mirrored in the research of D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014) and Ivec et al. (2012). D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014) outlined that the families' dissatisfaction can be beyond an individual practice issue but the impact of wider organisational issues in terms of staff turnover issues, unparalleled legal power that needs to be addressed. Ivec et al. (2012) suggested a "bottom-up" approach involving the families in all planning and decision making and a "top-down" approach to ensure all the shared goals and strategies are achieved by all the parties. The reflection of the families and the literature reiterate a whole system perspective in approaching the issues.

6.4.2 Group capacity building domain

The core categories of themes in the form of the families' alienation, in terms of a sense of being ignored; humiliated; helpless; anxious; excluded; disempowered; demonised; unfair treatment; confusion and powerlessness are not simply practice issues but reflect a lack of intense engagement skills, as also evidenced in much of the literature (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Platt, 2008), required to connect with the vulnerable people/families (Shulman, 1999, in Morrison, 2007 p.156).

In the process of understanding more about the core competencies, contemporary literature describes them as intra-personal and inter-personal emotional intelligence skills (Morrison, 2007). Grant, Kinman and Baker (2014) described the skills as a form of emotional resilience under a combined emotional intelligence, empathy and reflective capacities. The relevance of the professional, social and emotional skills in connecting with vulnerable people can be better understood in conjunction with the accounts of the families.

There are two elements here, the available emotional skills and competencies of the professionals, and the job of dealing with the complex emotions of very vulnerable people in building alliances. The frontline practitioners are constantly exposed to these significant demands, which do not simply involve working under the policy and legal frameworks but, as Bunting et al. (2015) emphasised, are crucial in a relationally based approach to build the required alliances.

Considering the significant demand for achieving high emotional core skills, Platt (2008) recommended that the frontline practitioners should be guided by psychotherapy literature to achieve the intense engagement skills. D'Cruz and Gillingham, (2014) suggested that the professional engagement skill needs to go beyond interpersonal communications to support and empower the families on their legal and practical needs while being aware of the power imbalance issue. Dumbrill (2006) also emphasised the child protection professionals' ability to acknowledge power imbalance issues in the alliance, which according to Dumbrill can cause coercive practice and alienate the families. The ICET mapping process has identified these issues through the specific core categories of theme as contributory factors in the families' disintegration due to difficulties in building a connection with the child protection workers.

Building on the discussion and mapping through the ICET stage process, the engagement skills, which contributed to the families' alienation and difficulty in building a connection with workers, have been located and analysed in a wider (group) context. Moore (2007 p. 203) has used the term "compatibility" in recognition of the professional credibility needed to build humanistic "coexistence" (i.e. rapport and connection) with vulnerable families under the values of unconditional positive regard and congruent communications as also proposed by Cherry, Carpenter, Water, Hawkins, McGraw, Satterwhite, Stepien, Ruppelt, and Herring (2008). The findings of this study indicate most of the families' experiences of being ignored, undermined, lack of empathy and indignity as parent, which all demonstrate how they felt in their alliance with the case workers as opposed to the suggested professional attributes presented by Moore (2007) and Cherry et al. (2008).

The ICET approach has articulated the voices of the families in building and nurturing the process of compatibility of workers by building their emotional skills and competence amidst equipping them with appropriate training and ongoing development in a group environment. Accordingly, individual compatibility has been located as a part of collective compatibility which is built and nurtured in the group domain. As Diaz (2015) emphasised, the argument for a group based approach is to facilitate a supportive human relations environment to continue to empower the team's morale, spirit, sense of belonging, mutual empathy, safety, support, connectivity in a respectful and safe environment, which will be replicated in each team member's inter-personal attitude and behaviour within and outside the team. In other words,

the empowered team environment will be a continuous source of support to facilitate whole team and the system to grow and flourish, which is consistent with the Gandhian approach of *Universal Development*. If an individual worker is empowered (with the above values) instead of the whole group/team (i.e. team environment and culture), the particular worker will be always at risk of being negatively challenged by the other disempowered team members who are not able to connect with the values of the empowered worker. In this regard a parent shared his experience of how the service suffers when a passionate case worker feels isolated in a team of very many not so committed staff members and then eventually leaves the service.

There are, however, some challenges in the group based compatibility approach. Cherry et al. (2008 p.430) in their research, in a slightly different context, developed a social compatibility based practice framework in dementia care by focusing on *creating a therapeutic social environment and an improved quality of life*. Cherry et al. (2008) noted cognitive and social skill diversity of the group members can be an issue in building group cohesiveness. In the child protection context, the skill diversity issue can be addressed through appropriate planning e.g. individual and group supervision, appropriate teambuilding initiatives to create the required group cohesiveness. While the discussion needs to continue with more research and practice based evidence and input, it offers an argument that the process of building emotional skills and competence of the frontline workers to effectively engage with families can better be considered in a group domain under a whole team building perspective rather than in isolation.

6.4.3 Individual (professional) competency building domain

The stage process of empowerment theories (ICET) has mapped the voices of the families in terms of professional practice issues as located in the individual capacity building domain. The professional competency issues have caused the parents to feel anxious, helpless, abandoned and find it hard to trust the system. The practice standard issues have been reinforced by a number of literature. The practice issues as experienced by the families have been analysed and identified as disempowering amidst a lack of ethical values, which are echoed in the findings of D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014); Dumbrill (2006); Harris (2012); Johnson and Sullivan (2008); Platt (2008); Dale (2004); Wiffin (2010). The practice issues around engagement and building effective partnerships are also noted by Bunting et.al. (2015) and Platt (2008) who then placed emphasis on relationship based practice with the families, while Platt (2008) outlined that the engagement process should include sensitivity, honesty, straightforwardness, listening and accurate information sharing, which are also noted (as lacking in practice) in the findings of this study. Johnson and Sullivan (2008) advocated for respectful and supportive relationships in the process of engagement with the families.   The

practice issues in terms of risk assessment and intervention have been highlighted in several publications (Wiffin, 2010; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Dumbrill, 2006). Poor communication issues are reinforced by the work of Johnson and Sullivan (2008); Forrester, (2008) and D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014). The other significant practice issues in terms of the quality of safe out of home care management are also noted in a number of research studies (Harris, 2012; Ivec et al., 2012; Dumbrill, 2006; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Dale, 2004; Forrester, 2008) including major child protection inquiry commissions in the UK (Laming, 2003; 2009) and in Australia by Crime and Misconduct Commission Inquiry (State of Queensland, 2004) and Carmody Inquiry Commission (State of Queensland, 2013).

The practice competency issues as raised by the families are not unknown in the academic and professional community in a global or local context. But the challenge is to build understanding of the experiences and expectations of the families to review the future practice and the service in general. This research has tried to explore the views and aspirations of families through an empowerment framework. The stage process has mapped the elements of professional practice issues, as outlined through the views and aspiration of the families, in the individual capacity building domain. The ICET model has identified the individual (professional) competency as one of the processes for the empowerment of the team/group as well as the whole system (i.e. the child protection system). This study noted how the families in general struggled with the professional conduct and attributes of the frontline practitioners and the line management behind the scene, which made them feel undermined, humiliated, anxious and disempowered leading to their alienation from the service amidst significant social and emotional distress to the families.

The ICET model has reinforced those voices of the families in understanding pathways of their empowerment through the workers' achieving individual professional competency leading up to the empowerment of the team and the whole child protection system. The Munro child protection review commission in the UK (Munro, 2011 p. 38) emphasized competency building for all the professionals involved in child protection through continuing professional development so that children and families can benefit from the use of best practice. She recommended that the child protection system should be flexible enough to enable professionals to incorporate new learning into their practice. In building and continuous monitoring of child protection practice, Munro (2011) recommended for the creation of positions like principal child and family social worker, who as a senior manager should carry lead responsibility for practice development in frontline practice and who could report the views and experiences of the front line to all levels of management. This contrasts with a traditional top-bottom management approach. In different jurisdictions, such as Queensland and Victoria, *Practice Leader* or *Principle Practice L*eader positions are already in place to support the child

protection practitioners locally with in the district. However, the argument is not just about creating practice leading position which is already in place in Queensland, but about enforcing the value to having a human service professionals like social worker leading that senior position to guide the team practice. This proposition is in full acknowledgement of critiques regarding roles of some social workers in this findings as well as in literature(Laming, 2009; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2010).

6.5 The families' aspirations for empowerment

As discussed before, the research has showcased the rich experiences of the participant families with the public child protection services and then attempted to map their views and aspirations against a meta-synthesis of diverse empowerment literature. The project has progressed in two fundamental phases and articulated an empowerment concept map (Figure 3) as reflected by the families.

In consolidating the voices of the families, as analysed in phase one and phase two, a connection has been noted between the process of empowerment of the families and the process of empowerment of the child protection system. However, this link must be understood against the background of several limitations of the research. In a literal meaning, the link suggests the families' aspiration for change in the public child protection system as a way forward for their improved experiences and resultant empowerment. The staged model has articulated a family informed systemic empowerment process in individual, group and systemic capacity building domains. Here are the consolidated aspirations of the families:

6.5.1 Need for opportunity to participate

The parents considered from their experiences that they were not involved, consulted, or provided with practical support while the child protection services made critical decisions about their children, like removing children from parental care. The lack of knowledge and control in the process and progress of the child protection intervention created profound anxiety, anger and frustration and further alienation from the ongoing child protection intervention process. These issues are also highlighted by D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014) and Laming (2009) that child protection practice is not simply about adhering to procedural justice, but carrying on the process objectively; finding what the families wanted, how much they understood their needs, what (supports) they received, to what extent they realised the outcome of empowerment intervention and what (appropriate) evaluation followed. A number of themes and sub-themes of the data encapsulates the families' lack of opportunity to participate in the decision making

and feedback sharing process, which were also acknowledged in the research of Ghaffar et al. (2012) and Harris (2012) who empahsised the value of partnership in decision making, feedback sharing and empathetic engagement and cooperation to enhance the wellbeing of children and families.

6.5.2 Need for consistency in communication

The process of communication is designed to raise awareness, to reassure with clarity, to enlighten, and guide stakeholders and key decision-makers in understanding, supporting, and sustaining a system of care. However, this study demonstrated how most of the families' struggle in maintaining necessary communication with the child protection services, which they described as very poor with no trust and confidence in the system. The comments of the families demonstrate the resultant sense of alienation with the child protection system. Some families have identified communication difficulties in the context of a lack of clarity or information regarding ongoing legal processes, future care plans, wellbeing and change of placement of children living in care, and contact arrangements. The communication issues in practice are also echoed in the research of Johnson and Sullivan (2008) who noted that incongruent communication between CPS and vulnerable families can lead to practitioners' potential threatening and intimidating behaviour towards the participants and treating the families as perpetrators rather than as victims. Johnson and Sullivan (2008) attributed power imbalance issues between the workers and the families as the key factor in incongruent communication. While highlighting these issues, Forrester et al. (2008) outlined that in some of their sampling, social workers were focused exclusively on concerns, and clients became entrenched in denying them, minimising them, and finding it very difficult to face them, in some cases becoming abusive, which impacted on the quality of communication leading to more misery, uncertainty and alienation for the distressed families.

6.5.3 Need for providing enabling space for integration with the services

An overwhelming majority of parents in this study have expressed their desire for support in building their parental skills and confidence. Several families contacted the CPS even before formal involvement. The families seemed to have relied a lot on the services for providing support or clear directions. The families' help seeking attitude reflect their willingness to engage with the service if a safe and supportive environment is created. Literature also provides evidence regarding the connection between engagement of service users and a conducive environment in the service. Bunting et al. (2015 p. 7) outlined in their research that parents will resist if they face fear of blame, negative change or feeling "less than", but a

sensitive and humane approach that recognises the individuals and respects their lived experiences can create an enabling space for engagement. Ghaffar et al. (2012) noted in their work that parents had an open view and clear understanding of the roles of child protection social workers. In their sample, three quarters of families could identify positive qualities in the professionals who supported them but what alienated them was daunting and intimidating experiences in multi-agency meetings, they also were critical of assessments using a deficit model and little therapeutic help offered for themselves and their children. The researchers argued for an empowerment focused approach building on empathy, safety and inclusive practice to create an enabling space for the families.

This research also demonstrated several families acknowledging professional concerns even though they were not entirely/partly in agreement with the concerns but expressed motivation to work through it. This reflected their potential to move forward (i.e. for positive change) in a supportive environment. These positive attitudes of the families are also acknowledged in the work of Ainsworth and Hansen (2011 p.10) who outlined that the families are expecting to be guided honestly and openly about what they must do to address their needs and improve their situations to regain custody of their children. However, the authors noted the caseworkers' limited ability to communicate in this way as they rarely identify the positive motivations of the families, which attributed to the coercive practice approach. Ainsworth and Hansen (2011) advocated for a relationship based practice approach in child protection practice.

In a particular case in this study, a couple had their own history of trauma reporting that the mother had a history of childhood sexual abuse and parental neglect. The father was also reportedly a victim of (unexplained) childhood trauma and both were struggling in managing their own emotional difficulties, which they acknowledged were impacting on their day to day parenting styles, which are acknowledged in literature (Vasconcelos, 2007; Wiffin, 2010). After losing their children following child protection intervention, the parents attended several parenting courses, to claim care of their children but still felt unsure if they would be taken seriously. This story reflects the experiential stories of other families and bears their sense of disempowerment as well as underlying hope for better services, which may also have motivated them to participate in the research. Bunting et al. (2015) acknowledged the negative impact of childhood adversity and argued that parents should not be treated as just a collection of risk factors. Rather, there is need for a comprehensive understanding of the life experiences and the impact. This can provide a strong foundation for empathetic practice, moving beyond blame while recognising strength and difficulties.

All the participating family members in this study have raised concerns of being treated with little or no empathy or dignity amidst poor rapport with the child protection workers, which is also noted in previous research. While Dumbrill (2006) identified the practitioners' lack of

insight regarding the impact of power imbalances leading to coercive practice, Bunting et al. (2015) and Ghaffar et al. (2012) noted that the deficit based practice approach has emphasised risk and blame, which all contributed to disempowering practice and the families' alienation from service. The parents raised questions regarding professionalism and ethical values of the case workers during the application of statutory power, which are also noted in the literature (Dumbrill, 2006; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014). Some parents claimed that child safety officers were making significant decisions about their lives without meeting them or giving them the opportunity to defend themselves. The families have outlined their disintegration with the child protection services in terms of a sense of fear and their difficulty in trusting the system. The alienated parents expressed their reliance more on the court directed independent assessment rather than the public child protection workers. These reflections capture the families' sense of struggle to engage and connect with the child protection workers, which is also acknowledged in previous research.

Harris (2012) noted that a formulistic assessment approach has undermined the value of the engagement process with families, just as a statutory compliance. Because of this the CPS could not benefit from new innovative empowering approaches like family group conferences inclusion in case conferences, models of differential response, strengths based practice. Gillingham (2014) noted that the structured decision making (SDM) approach does not really facilitate broader safeguarding goals. The families' difficulties in building trusting relationships with the service reiterate the need to review all levels of approaches in practice. If parents felt isolated, nothing much can be helpful in seeking their cooperation until relationships are reestablished. Buckley, Carr and Whelan (2011) noted engagement issues as an obstacle in the families' realising the benefit of the service. They offered some simple social techniques for consideration, "being normal, 'easy to talk to' and reassuring, sit down, have a cup of tea…. . . talk about the hurling . . . he was an everyday bloke".

6.5.4 Need for improvement in organisation and coordination

Over three-quarters of the parents raised concerns about the inconsistency in implementing professional decisions such as complying with the care plan, organising safe care, counselling for the children and facilitating family contact. One parent reflected that when he contacted the CPS initially for specialist support for his children emotionally struggling (with significant behavioural consequences) following a parental breakup, he was told CPS would not be involved without a (substantiated) child protection investigation. While it can be acknowledged that CPS are governed by the policy of their intake system, the lack of scope to accommodate the preempting issues of the families may be considered as gaps in service (Buckley et al.,

2011). Service management issues continued in post intervention practice. Johnson and Sullivan (2008) noted in their research findings that an overwhelming number of parents felt misunderstood and unsupported by their case workers and believed that this treatment directly harmed them and their children. Ghaffar et al. (2012) outlined the families' emotional struggle for not considering their mental health needs in the care process and argued for the need to strive for a more consistent response to children and their families, when children are subjected to a care plan. The researchers also stressed the need for and the importance of a stable workforce in executing the plans.

In this study, the parents commented about workforce issues in terms of practitioners' professional discipline and values in building empathetic and fair practice. A parent questioned practice values in managing legal system, which according to him is not allowing harmony between the families and the CPS through win win outcomes. The issues are also discussed in the literature review in terms of conflict between child protection and family support as well as conflict between procedural approach and family empowerment focused approach (Parton and Mathews, 2001; Ivec et al., 2012).

In relation to professional disciplines, D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014) advocated centralising social work as a professional discipline due to the strong professional values towards human service and relationship based practice, which they see consistent with the organisational trends in other Anglophone countries. Ainsworth and Hansen (2006 p.39) argue that the Australian child protection organisations' de-professionalisation approach allows them to recruit practitioners from a range of disciplines including nursing, teaching and others who primarily but not exclusively hold tertiary education qualifications. According to these authors, this has allowed the child protection workers to resort to bureaucratic and legalistic practices that do not reflect any particular professional values. There are also other auxiliary workers in the system who may or may not have tertiary human service qualification. In Australia, each jurisdiction is different in regards to the level of qualifications they will accept, so consistent value based approaches are difficult to sustain. These issues are also reinforced in the literature (Ainsworth and Hansen, 2006; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Lonne et al., 2009) as issues requiring appropriate national policy level attention to build strong and consistent service ethos.

The parents also reflected on organisational coordination and disruption issues considering frequent staff changes and internal delegation of authority. The parents commented that the frequent change of worker and manager caused a lot of repetition and confusion for them. This issue is acknowledged in terms of sincerity by Buckley et al. (2011) who described the issue as suggestive of an organisational culture that placed a low priority on basic courtesy, stability and punctuality of service.

Some families linked the frequent change of workers with a delay in the legal process as well as dis-integrity amidst lack of coordination and delegation of authority between the front-line workers and the managerial staff, which the parents thought caused a sense of distrust and confusion about power sharing functioning in the system. The parents also felt that there was no guarantee that decisions made by the frontline workers will be maintained by their managers which is also acknowledged by Munro (2010) in terms of the organizational culture of top to down information and delegation of the authority approach. The high volume of staff changes in the child protection system has been identified by Wiffin (2010) as a major issue to be addressed and called for stability in the human resource management.

The significance of supports, guidance and nourished opportunities are reinforced by the parents' very difficult circumstances like the impact of their own early developmental trauma, mental health issues, domestic violence, parental break up and its impact on the children. The complex behavioural, emotional and practical needs of the children are also noted in the findings of Bunting et al. (2015), who described the issues of the families as intertwined and co-occurring adversities having long standing impact in their lives.

The parents also reflected on the profound emotionally draining and disempowering impact of losing children into care, without any support and guidance, which they have linked to losing hope. The families' ability to share their experiences can also be seen as their aspirations for receiving nourished opportunities, which they can access to help themselves. Sen's (1999; 2005) work also articulates the value of nourished resources in empowering vulnerable people who are alienated from the mainstream service.

6.5.5 Need for appropriate efficiency in care placement arrangements

The experiential comments of all the participants outlined a lack of careful planning and arrangements in the process of statutory care placements. All the family members have claimed this causes further trauma to children who have already experienced trauma through the separation from parents and siblings, as also noted in the work of Catchpole (2008). The families have outlined several concerns in care arrangements in terms of, adequate safety; social and emotional wellbeing; specialist support; adequate parental and sibling contacts; keeping siblings together; prioritising children' individual needs and adequate time and space in parental contact arrangements; communication with parents about contact arrangements; safe boundary setting and value education; protecting socio-cultural needs in selecting care arrangements; protecting children's sense of identity with their biological family and not to be taken over by foster carers; adequate information and guidance for parents regarding the process to achieve family reunification when CPS closes the case etc. This significant list of

concerns reflects the families' sense of disempowerment as well as their inner hope that their voices should be reflected in future professional decisions and intervention. The support issues are more critical in remote rural areas. Removal of children from parental care followed by poor care arrangements can be traumatic for the children and young people. This is noted in the work of Mullan et al. (2007) who outlined that young people feel very disoriented in care in relation to the reasons why they were placed in care and/or remain in care and, left unchecked. This disorientation can be compounded by adversity like abuse, placement breakdown and other traumatic changes (Bunting et al., 2015).

The issues around finding culture specific care placement arrangement may be a practical challenge for the CPS, but this is a critical need, particularly in relation indigenous families as also reinforced by Ivec et al. (2012). The discussion can be expanded if there are any rural remote factors associated with the issue. A parent questioned why the breakdown of a placement received insufficient investigation to further understand the issues so it can be better managed in the future. The parent reported that his child underwent forty different placement changes while accumulating several issues like drug misuse, delinquency, self-harm as well as being raped in statutory care. There is literature to support the multiple negative impact of difficult out of home care arrangements (Mullan et al., 2007; Catchpole, 2008; Laming, 2009). Mc Clung and Gayle (2010) looked at the academic impact of difficult care arrangements and noted that looked-after children are being discriminated against and generally perform less well academically than the general school population. Almost all the parents commented about their concerns regarding practice approaches in out of home care management. The issues raised by the families have reinforced the argument to empower the practitioner and the services in general for better outcomes in the future. The parents have raised fundamental questions about the process of care placement arrangements and advocated for addressing them by highlighting specific domains of concerns.

6.5.6 Community resource development on legal assistance

It is important to note here that Legal Aid is a statutory support service and is not directly governed by the CPS. The Legal Aid Service in Queensland is a government organisation that provides legal information, advice and representation to financially disadvantaged Queenslanders (Legal Aid Queensland, 2006). This service has a significant role to play to protect the rights of the vulnerable families who feel excluded and isolated from the ongoing child protection management services. However, the families have raised concerns with regard to the current process (i.e. quality and delay) of its services in protecting their rights, as also noted in the work of D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014). The researchers argued for relationship based practice approach with specific focus on supporting the families on   legal

complexities, as they noted the families found the processes complex, confusing, protracted, extremely daunting and destructive to family relationships. The families have raised the efficiency issues of the legal aid in terms of a lack of adequate funding support, including pre-empting the court in assessing the parents. Most of the parents felt that the free legal aid practitioners were not competent enough to successfully advocate their case. The respondent parents questioned the integrity and competency of the services in defending their rights. In retrospect, parents attempted to source their own funds to hire a competitive solicitor or undertook self-representation to successfully advocate their cases. The experiential comments of the participants regarding the process of functioning of the Legal Aid Services reflect their sense of helplessness as well as advocacy for their rights for competent legal support services in the community. This resource imbalance factors in the system, as identified by the families, can be seen as significant power of the CPS and comparative vulnerability of the families as noted by Dumbrill, (2006) who suggested this trend has created a sense of helplessness and disempowerment, which can alienate the families from the service.

6.6 Vision of the parents

The parents have articulated their voices in the contexts of their lived experiences with the public child protection services. They wanted fairness in the service; to be treated with respect, empathy and dignity and not with enmity or competition but a "win win" situation rather than one side must win in the court of law. This (*win win*) comment of a parent reflects his expectations to create such situation, which is again about practice competency like how the practitioners are constructing the case reporting for the court. The families have aspired to be treated as human beings who can make mistakes and are provided with all the necessary support in the course of the traumatic experience of losing children into care. The families should receive honest and necessary information about the investigation process and clear directions and support in guiding future pathways regarding rehabilitation of children at home. These visions of the families are also advocated by Munro (2011). Munro's further emphasises on building relationships with these families with compassion can be considered a way forward under a reflective learning approach in taking forward the findings as highlighted in this research.

In context of indigenous families, Ivec et al. (2012) argued for social work based empowerment approach to build connections with the families and communities. Ivec and colleagues felt, in the aftermath of "stolen generation" any legalistic procedural approach which only thrust on administration of law and removing risks will likely to isolate   the families (Ivec et al., 2012).

The families asked for inclusive approach amidst swiftness, sincerity and consistency in implementing the care plan/court decisions in all matters, so that parents are not confused or kept in the dark and children do not suffer. They advocated to keep the children alongside parents on the information loop about every child protection proceeding and future plans sincerely and honestly. This is also reflected in the research of Ghaffar et al. (2012) who argued that child protection authorities should find ways of systematically harnessing parents' views and advice, not least to secure improvements in crucial areas like risk assessment and management. In the event of the safeguarding issue, some families preferred care through the family rather than state care by delivering all necessary support to the family in the beginning, in order for the children to continue living at home. They asked to keep the child and the family in the forefront of all investigation, assessment and consultation processes and not be guided by foster carers or third parties. They aspired to sincerely organise children's contact with parents on a regular basis. Apart from parental contact, contact among siblings should also be organised regularly and sincerely. They felt this would help maintain the bond so that they are able to remain in contact and help each other when parents are not around anymore. The parents asked to ensure that out of home care arrangements are carefully planned with *good judgement* so that already traumatized children are not further traumatized due to a delay or poor selection of placement compromising their safety, emotional and cultural wellbeing. They asked that health assessments are organised promptly together with support, including counselling, for children following removal from parental care. They asked for independent and fair assessment to be organised in the early stage of the legal process to avoid a delay in the judgement with its negative consequences to children. These views are also reflected in the work of Ghaffar et al. (2012) who asked for more direct support and help for children with their behaviour and emotional difficulties when needed and also emphasised building on the children's judgements, which can often be enlightening. The families talked about their struggles to seek practical support in the pre-intervention stage and did not receive adequate help or none. One parent talked about how his request for help was not considered due to not meeting enough child protection criteria. This is also acknowledged in the research of Buckley et al. (2011 p.106) who referred to a frustrated mother and pointed out that the threshold for service provision was so high that 'you would need a knife in your child's back in order to get attention'. The parents asked for opportunities for confidential, timely independent advice and guidance within the public child protection services, which parents could use any time without fear or intimidation. They also aspired to have access to efficient, independent complaint services, which the parents can use without any fear or intimidation in the event of the necessity to lodge a complaint.

6.7 Where does the current research stand in view of previous research?

1.   Reaffirming previous findings and beyond

The key findings are about diverse issues in the public child protection services. The issues have been noted in terms of frontline practice issues, the families' sense of alienation from the process of intervention and systemic issues, which have all been reported in previous research (Dumbrill, 2006; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Harris, 2012; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Dale, 2004; Wiffin, 2010; Ivec et al., 2012). Building on the past research, which suggested relationally based family informed child protection services, this research has approached the experiences through an empowerment framework. Building on the voices of the families, the significant points emerged in this thesis are: The families' acknowledgement regarding the role of child protection services in keeping children safe suggests they are workable with if the case workers can engage with them. The families want safe and respectful practical support before child protection intervention. This they believe would be the best way to keep the children at home. In light of the difficult experiences of the families regarding damaging impact of living in out of home care, there are arguments that every effort should be made to keep children at home with intensive family support or building on legal measure for appropriate arrangements like supervision order etc. allowing statutorily monitoring progress at home under a relationally based respectful partnership of care with the families (Lonne et al., 2009). The supervision process may facilitate safety and total developmental wellbeing in their natural family environment. If a protection order is necessary, then the alleged abusive parent could be removed and the children supported to remain with a non-abusing parent when possible. Parents asked for specialist assessment and counselling support for children. Parents asked for more focus on sibling contacts, time space for parental contact by prioritising individual needs of children (including socio-cultural needs) and adequate support to improve family mediation when children are placed in kinship care. The parents also asked for imparting ethical values in the practice of the case workers. This research argues for building on the voices of the families to consider empowerment of the case workers in the individual competency context, in the team building (group) context as well as in the social care governance and management (systemic) context, rather than considering any of the factors in isolation.

2.   Application of the empowerment theory as a way of understanding of the views and experiences of the families

This research is about building an understanding of the experiences of a cohort of families and how these have shaped them and their children's circumstances in an empowerment

framework, thereby providing a foundation for family empowerment informed practice. As discussed before, the study has mapped the analysed primary data and reported on the families' critical reflections on their lived experiences and process of their empowerment. The findings of previous research articulated the value of a strength based approach in the public child protection management process. In congruence with previous research, this research has not only attempted to give voice to the vulnerable families but specifically analysed and refined the voices under an empowerment framework to report on how the concept and process of family empowerment informed child protection service makes sense. This also articulates how an empowerment framework can support and further develop the development approaches articulated in previous research.

6.8 Conclusion

The purpose of the chapter has been to discuss the findings from the analysed primary data as well as outcome of the ICET mapping process. The discussion has presented the findings in light of the literature based evidence to reinforce the arguments with some identified validity. The methodological part of the dissertation has acquired its own position in theorising and structuring the discussion process. The findings have remained a significant part of the discussion in articulating the voices of the families. The voices of the families have been reflected in terms of their lived experiences with the public child protection system, their aspirations for change and the ICET mapping outcome, which all have structured the change process by analysing the core categories of themes from the primary data. The discussions raise important implications for the public child protection system, policy makers, professionals and academia to review and respond to the findings and associated challenges as an emergent argument in the area of public child protection management process.

In the context of such restricted data, and ethical issues as discussed in the methodology, no conclusive comments can be drawn in this discussion. However, the study is built on previous research and articulates the voices of the families through the empowerment framework to make sense of their experiences in empowerment ways. The study has created space for more research to further build on the experiences and aspirations of the families.

Building on this discussion, the next chapter of the dissertation presents the conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter discusses findings in the context of the research objectives. It also discusses the process and outcome factors of empowerment. The chapter offers some implications for practice drawing on the findings. The need for more research and structured discussion is also acknowledged to contribute to the argument for family empowerment focused child protection management.

7.1 Addressing the objectives of the study

The focus of the research is to provide a deeper understanding in the ways in which families conceptualise their experiences with the public child protection services using an empowerment framework. The topic of the study, re-visioning child protection management embedded in family empowerment, has also set the objectives of the project, which have been addressed through a qualitative enquiry approach. The study has analysed and mapped the experiences of the families against an empowerment lens (Integrated Construct of Empowerment Theories-ICET) to make sense of the narratives, which are consistent with the scholarly literatures advocating for family informed child protection management by building competence and engagement skills of the workforce (Dumbrill, 2006; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et al., 2012; Harris, 2012; Johnson & Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Dale, 2004). The perspectives of the families challenge policy makers, professionals and the academic community to acknowledge the views and find a way in which their service experiences can be improved. Additionally, the rich experiential reflections of the families can empower the child protection professionals themselves by enhancing their knowledge and understanding about the views and needs of the families in the assessment and intervention process, as also highlighted by Ghaffar et al. (2012) and Munro (2011).

The families were able to provide extensive accounts of their experiences and the impact of the professional decisions and actions on their lives. The rich insights of the families stress the value of collecting their regular feedback in reviewing the quality of services, its impact and clarifying how the future services could improve.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the emerging core categories of themes have located the primary data in the context of practice, alienation and management issues. Viewing the themes

through the ICET lens has synthesised the voices of the families, and this offers ideas on how services could incorporate more explicit aspects of empowerment. The mapping of the data has identified the families' association of their empowerment with the empowerment of the public child protection services in three stages. The three-staged empowerment approach, (1) individual professional competency building, (2) team compatibility building and (3) leadership and operational development, has increased our understanding regarding the impact of the child protection management process and offers a way forward from the perspective of the families.

The report of the Carmody Inquiry Commission (State of Queensland, 2013), CMC (State of Queensland, 2004) and also some contemporary Australian research literature (Lonne, 2013; Lonne et al., 2014; Lonne et al., 2009; Ainsworth and Hansen, 2011; Harris, 2012; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ivec et al., 2012) have reinforced many of the core issues highlighted in this project. The families' sense of disempowerment and alienation in light of current child protection practice approaches has also reaffirmed the scholarly literature, which articulated the need for a family informed child protection practice approach underpinned by the vision of empowerment due to concerns around the more child safety focused procedural approach. The rising national statistics of Australian children (1 out of 37 children between 0-17) attending public child protection services with 73% repeat service users (AIHW, 2015) also highlights the key findings in response to the research objectives.

7.2 Empowerment: Process and outcome factors

The emerging integrated form of the process and outcome of empowerment intervention is discussed in chapter 6 through Figure 3. The experiences of the families show that the beginning of empowerment intervention starts with the process that has the potential to integrate or disintegrate the families before the outcome is even realised. It has been noted from the primary data that the process of child protection management intervention had issues in connecting with the families, which is reflected in the reported views and aspirations of the family members. For example, as expressed by the overwhelming majority of the families, in the matter of organising support for the families following the removal of children, the process of child protection intervention did not provide appropriate parenting support or clear guidance regarding pathways for improving their parenting skills. As a result of the process, the families felt alienated from the intervention amidst the outcome of not feeling supported and empowered. The three process components - practice issues, management issues and the team building issue - as noted from the core themes from the primary findings have been analysed under the ICET lens.

The discussion indicates that the process of human services intervention should acknowledge and be guided by the needs and aspirations of the people concerned, and evidenced by the recipients' lived experiences with the service (Bunting et al., 2015). If this were to happen, then the positive outcome of the intervention will be realised by the families through their consistent engagement in the intervention process. The discussion, as also articulated in Chapter 6, reflects on the coherent relationship between the empowering aspects of the process and the outcome of supportive intervention.

It is also important to state that it may be challenging to work with the vulnerable families due to a number of factors (Munro, 2010). However, the parents' individual issues do not necessarily mean that they are unable to be worked with (Ghaffar et al., 2012) as the finding of the study has shown an overwhelming number of the families' have a keen interest in engaging with the service if an enabling situation is created. Building on primary data, this study identified a list of potential factors in commissioning a positive working situation with vulnerable families:

a) Non-threatening, safe, genuine, respectful and empathetic professional approach and behaviour at all times.

b) Keeping the families on board through inclusion, consultations and adequate information in every stage of professional involvement.

c) Reciprocating the families' help seeking attempts swiftly with adequate practical support, information and reliable and clear guidance about current and future processes.

d) Having dependability and trust worthiness in the frontline case workers.

e) Reassuring and clear prior-discussion on any change in the service i.e. case plan, care placement, legal status; court process and statutory plan, change of workers and managers and transferring cases to another team etc.

f) Facilitating honest and consistent communication while acknowledging the families' practical and emotional challenges and working on their ideas/aspirations in the context of respectful partnership.

g) Re-building and maintaining the public reputation of the CPS as a genuinely caring service, to instil confidence in families before entering into the service.

The above enabling factors can facilitate creating connections through the process, based on the families' needs and aspirations. In this study, the parents voluntarily participated and openly talked about the complex topic of primary concerns raised by the child protection services and the reasons for the statutory child protection service's intervention. The openness of the parents reflects their capacity to acknowledge professional concerns (even though they were not entirely/partly agreeable to the concerns), and interests and motivation to   explore

the issues in a safe, respectful and supportive environment. It is important to note that families were made aware during the recruitment process of the potential emotional impact of revisiting their past experiences during the interview, but they still chose to participate and contribute to the academic research. One might argue here that they were more willing to engage because they knew "what's done is done" and this interview does not impact on keeping their children, so the context is different and therefore their behaviour, demeanour, outlook and capacity to acknowledge the issues might be different. However, in light of their very complex experiences, the helping attitude of the parents demonstrated their social and emotional capability to revisit and own their story and demonstrated the potential to move forward with a positive change, in a supportive environment of trust, respect, dignity and openness with reassurance provided in the course of the interview.

The empowerment needs of the families can be seen in both moral and legal perspectives. Building up an appropriate process and outcome is a matter not only for the realisation of the rights of parents but also for the realisation of the human rights of the children. That children should be cared for within their natural families, if at all possible, is the guidance from the major policy institutions including Queensland's child protection legislation (State of Queensland, 2015). The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights described family as a 'central unit' accountable for the wellbeing of children and it mandated for appropriate policy and legislation to empower and preserve the integrity of the family (OHCHR, 2007). The Federal Australian Government's National Framework for Protecting Australian Children 2009-2020 has put the family in the forefront while acknowledging the shared responsibility within the family, community, voluntary and statutory services and has strongly advocated for investment in family empowerment (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). In light of these commitments it is necessary to effectively assess the progress we are making, in implementing a process and a well-integrated approach, which can reflect the realisation of the empowerment outcome by the families (Higgins, 2011 p. 7).

The voices of the families can be acknowledged as an indication of the nature of effectiveness of the ongoing policy and action plan. The reflected struggle, hope and aspirations of the families have reinforced some recommendations as implications for practice.

7.3 Recommendations

This thesis has presented the voices of a cohort of families on their experiences with the public child protection services. In the context of the limitation in the data set, no generalised recommendations may be made. However, assuming the views of the small group of people do matter in order to understand and manage their needs in future, this study has identified some implications for future discussion and possible change as a contribution to the debate. The families' sense of disempowerment and alienation may have connection with frontline practice and team compatibility issues, but the leadership and operation system governing the power structure and rules and boundaries attribute significantly to the service improvement and development, as also acknowledged in previous literature (Bundy-Fizioli, Briar-Lawson and Hardiman, 2008; D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ghaffar et al., 2012). In view of the emerging core themes from the findings on the practice, management and alienation issues of the families, a set of principles has been articulated against those experiences and in the context of other literature as a starting point to reinforce the discussion for future practice development embedded in family empowerment.

7.3.1 Principles to follow in child protection management

1) Parents are the natural carers in a child's life; they are entitled to be included, consulted and supported as significant partners in every stage of professional involvement and the states must ensure these rights of parents are upheld (OHCHR, 2007; Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).

2) The families' entitlement of empowerment to care for their children is their human right (Sen, 1999; 2005).

3) Children have the right to know their parents and, as far as possible, be cared for by parents and have family ties. The government should provide support for the children of families in need (Article 7, 8 and 26, OHCHR, 2007).

4) Services have a duty and responsibility to strive to connect with the vulnerable and alienated families by building up their confidence and capabilities to be effective partners in the process (Article 5 and 18, OHCHR, 2007).

5) Service should prioritise the protection of children and families as a process of promoting long-term safety and the wellbeing of children (Wiffin, 2010).

The principles can also be inferred to as protecting the rights of the children by advocating rights of the families and specifically parents. These principled optimistic points are driven by the findings of this study, and it may be that some are already in place in some jurisdictions. However, these aim to influence the public child protection system's governance and

operational management to facilitate the appropriate process for empowerment of the child protection professionals and the families.

7.3.2 Assessment framework for optimum participation of the parents

Consistent with the above principles to reinforce family empowerment focused governance, the following process structure has been added to the discussion as a potential inclusive empowerment based assessment and intervention approach. These propositions are informed by the primary data as theoretically analysed under the ICET mapping process.

1. <u>Investigation stage:</u> The initial investigation stage should include the families and facilitate a transparent, supportive and reassuring consultation and engagement process with parents, who should feel they are treated with respect and dignity while supported and find reasons to engage with the service.

2. <u>Assessment stage:</u> If the case progresses to the assessment stage a core assessment may commence. This process needs to create an enabling space as per the individual needs of the parents, which primarily focuses on connecting with the families to facilitate insight and knowledge development, including confidence and motivation building among the parents. While it is acknowledged that the judge has ultimate authority in the judicial process in court, it is also about how the practitioner is implementing the framework under a balance of power sharing with the families. The focus shall be protecting the safety and long term wellbeing needs of the child in his/her natural family environment. The process would be relationally based and ethically driven embedded in family empowerment. This is the critical argument in this research.

   The recently adopted child protection practice framework (State of Queensland, 2015a) has emphasised setting the scene through wider principles, values, knowledge and skill development, while outlining some tools like the *Three Houses Models* (worries, good things and hopes and dreams), some of which are also incorporated in the snapshot, *collaborative assessment and planning framework* (State of Queensland, 2015a). The outlined wider values and structured principles are very important, although the experiences of the families in this research (undertaken before implementation of the new practice model) do not evidence implementation of many of the practice principles and values on the ground. However, the *Three Houses Model* based components have created opportunities as reflective space for the families, which is important. But, again, building on this study regarding the families' demonstrated ability to engage in rich reflections about their very difficult past

demonstrates that this (i.e. capability to reflect) may not be their majour needs. Rather, what is important at this stage is a practice framework which is able to connect with the families through empowerment intervention by rebuilding their confidence, in themselves and with the service, by creating an enabling environment built on collaborative shared goals with the families that their children will be growing up in their natural environment with parents (OHCHR, 2007).

3. Intervention stage: The intervention process may streamline a joint child protection management plan in close partnership with families under clear short and long-term goals. Consistent with the core concept of the research, even if the short term child protection intervention indicates the need for a Protection Order, the long-term goal should nonetheless focus on maintaining a connection between the child and the parents and empowering the parents by providing them with clear and dependable guidance and support (which the families can trust and rely on) so that children can be rehabilitated at home with the family if at all possible or prepare the parents for the future. The empowerment work with parents should progress simultaneously alongside work with children living in state care.

7.3.3 Empowering child protection governance

The ICET mapping and analysis of the themes from the primary data has articulated the following three dimensional components for empowerment of the child protection system, which is indicated by the families as pathways to their empowerment.

Operational and leadership development: Consistent with the argument of Lonne et al. (2009) regarding an urgency for a change in the understanding and consequent organisation of child protection management systems, this research has linked the issues around quality of service delivery by the frontline staff in light of needs of workforce development through appropriate training, ongoing post learning development, supervision and practical supports. These needs are broader systemic issues relevant to the roles and accountabilities of the leadership team in social care governance. The leadership team of the service needs to demonstrate its commitment by creating a work culture that cares about the families, which is also advocated by Bunting et al. (2015), Ivec et al., (2012) and Laming (2009). In context of the legal authority and power of the child protection leadership and the scholarly demand for a paradigm shift toward empowering the families as well as the frontline workers (Harris, 2012; Ivec et al., 2012; Dumbrill, 2006), Freire (1970) articulated a principled vision that power is dynamic and

created in relationships that can always be achieved through respect, collaboration and trust. The key to improved policy and practice that builds the culture of care for everybody (i.e. service providers and service receivers) resides in recognising the crucial ethical and moral context and consequences of the human service work (Lonne et al., 2009).The commitment can be demonstrated through strategic partnerships (Ghaffar et al., 2012; Platt, 2008) with the families in planning, organisation, development and evaluation. According to Ghaffar et al. (2012), the notions of the power of the child protection services and partnership with the families are important to deepening the understanding of relationships between the two sides in building the service.

Competent work force: The ICET mapping process has identified the individual worker's (professional) competency building as the process for the empowerment of the child protection system. Professional competency issues have been acknowledged internationally, as highlighted in literature from several different contexts. Dumbrill (2006) noted competency issue as lack of insight and management, while D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014); Ghaffar et al. (2012); Harris (2012); Johnson and Sullivan (2008) and Platt (2008) emphasised building skills in relationships, engagement and partnership based practice. This study noted how the families in general struggled with the conduct and attributes of the frontline practitioners and the line management behind the scenes, which made them feel undermined, humiliated, anxious and disempowered leading to their alienation from the service. These complex experiences of the families have provided an impetus for a re-focusing of the services, not just in Australia but in many other English-speaking countries, as argued by Lonne et al. (2009); Lonne (2013) and Buckley et al. (2011). Given the demand for a high standard service, the process of tertiary level (professional) human service knowledge, skills and values are an absolute necessity on the part of the child protection case workers and frontline managers. This is also acknowledged in the work of D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014) and Ainsworth and Hansen (2006) who specifically argued for social work qualification in line with the recruitment trends of Anglophone countries. The frontline managers should be able to facilitate appropriate practical support and operational supervision as well as clinical supervision (Platt, 2008) to the staff members as is necessary to maintain advanced levels of practice.

Compatible workforce: This research attempts to understand and approach the professional engagement and connection issue with the families beyond individual practice competency. The analysis and mapping through the ICET stage process has located the team building and compatibility element, which contributed to the families' alienation and difficulty in building a connection with workers, in a wider group context. Building on scholarly literature which emphasises the enhancement of engagement skills (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Harris, 2012; Johnson and Sullivan, 2008; Platt, 2008; Wiffin, 2010; Ivec et al., 2012), together with

social compatibility skills, these may reinforce a new way of creating an efficient, confident, accountable and emotionally competent workforce who can establish a therapeutic alliance and connect with the vulnerable (and often traumatised) families and empower them to remain engaged with the service. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), to build the intense engagement and connection skills the staff members need an appropriate training process. The purpose of the creative development process is to empower the front-line staff through effective team building and creating appropriate human relations conditions in the work place. This may be evidenced by staff members feeling safe, respected, valued and integrated in the team while developing positive morale and motivation as a member of the team. The process is integrative and mutually empowering for the client and the worker, and has the scope to influencing and strengthening the system, which in turn re-empowers the workers to further empower the clients. The ICET model has articulated the nurturing process of individual compatibility of workers in the group domain. The rationale for the worker's own compatibility and building skills in a group environment has been evolved from the basic argument that in order to empower others, one needs to be empowered, and assured of a consistent sense of empowerment in his/her environment (Morrison, 2007). This means, in order to be qualified to help others, one needs to achieve those specific skill/s. In this context, Shulman (1999, in Morrison, 2007 p.156) outlines the process for the practitioner to develop help giving emotional skills:

> The capacity to be in touch with the client's feelings is related to the worker's ability to acknowledge his/her own. Before a worker can understand the power of emotion in the life of the client, it is necessary to discover its importance in the worker's own experience.

The core components here are the vital social and emotional skills for establishing a human connection. This means, one needs to experience and develop personally first, before being able to demonstrate these skills in performance. The challenge becomes further compounded when establishing a connection with a group of vulnerable people like the families in this study, who struggle to trust the system (Ivec et al., 2012). This re-affirms the need for a new way of thinking in addressing the compelling challenge of the service.

<u>Streamlining a whole social care process with prevention, care, protection and family support services:</u> The public child protection system may develop separate teams to address the family empowerment issues. The system may consider an empowerment focused approach (empowering skills of workers in empowering the families) in managing early intervention as prevention, child protection, out of home care and family support needs with appropriate emphasis and specialist skills and training as the service deserves. The research of Lonne et al. (2014) in Victoria suggests that reliance on voluntary sectors to address tertiary level family

support issues seems highly contestable due to several reasons, and skill issues of the workers was one of the factors. There seems an urgency that the system needs to create its own resources within its facilities. Some of these processes like preventative measures and capacity and strength building in families are already articulated in the National Child Protection Framework (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009 p.6). Lonne et al. (2009) noted that while the pro-family measures are the signs of a gradual shift from narrow, forensic and investigatory approaches, it has encouraged a culture of managerialisation and proceduralisation which have put greater emphasis on introducing sophisticated systems, procedures, assessments and outcome frameworks including computerised systems. The procedural techniques can be important but the more important part is connecting with the families by building their trust and confidence in the system while facilitating their effective participation in the system. However, the dominance of the managerialist audit culture does not always recognise the value of a relationally based practice agenda that highlight the ethical and moral dimension of the work (Lonne et al., 2009). The findings of this research suggest that the families perceived the child protection services more in terms of being a policing organisation, often hostile and oppressive, rather than a family empowerment service, which they felt a part of (Wiffin, 2010).

Feedback from the families: The public child protection system may set up a safe and effective system for collecting rich feedback (following investigation and assessment, intervention and at closing or evaluation stages) from the service using families to review and rebuild the service. There is also a need to have a clear transparent process in the system to implement the feedback in the governance of the service. The work of Ghaffar et al. (2012 p. 903) also reinforces the value of feedback from families as a rich source of knowledge and guidance, that can address the professionals' bias and pre-conceived notions about the families in the process of child protection assessment and intervention. Such feedback will not only help the service to progress with an open mind but could facilitate the required engagement to connect with the families in future.

Feedback from the frontline child protection workers: The public child protection system may also consider collecting regular feedback from the frontline case workers in a safe manner, without any fear or intimidation. This is further reinforced in the context of some participant families' observations of the helplessness of frontline workers being undermined by their own managers, causing confusion and helplessness to the families. The rich experiences of the workers about their needs, feelings, sense of belongingness and generic ground level experiences and challenges, may add a new perspective about frontline services and the service as a whole. There is also the need to have a swift process to implement the feedback into the governance of the system, a need also highlighted by Munro (2010).

Industry-academia partnerships: The high demand for a compatible and professionally competent workforce indicates a need for an industry-academia partnership. For example, the direct involvement of the social work academia with the local public child protection social services may create space for facilitating appropriate knowledge and skills transfer and development. This argument is reinforced by Munro (2011 p.98) who asked for greater collaboration between social work academia and child protection organisations, where by scope is created for employers to apply for special 'teaching organisation' status, awarded by the social work institution/authority. This would facilitate child protection leadership teams to be mentored/supervised by the teaching faculty to upgrade their continuous supervisory skills, which should ultimately be transferred to skill and practice development of the front line social workers. In return, the academicians would get an updated picture of challenges in the practice setting that they can bring to their research and teaching to prepare the future generation of social workers. In this regard, Munro (2011 p.97) noted that newly qualified social workers are especially unprepared to engage with vulnerable families, as theory and research are not always well integrated with practice. The findings of this research have articulated the families' reflections on case workers' skills and competence issues in terms of lack of reliance on the professionals' ability to assess and manage their needs and do justice to them. There might be challenges in maintaining swift communication and timely support and resources in remote /rural locations. These needs can be addressed through creative approaches like effective use of communication technology. The researcher has anecdotal experiences of effective using of such facility as a professional in a remote location of Rural North Queensland. However, this may not always be a smooth experience in other areas as the process heavily relies on appropriate technical supports.

Advice and guidance cell: The public child protection services may need to set up an independent consultation and guidance service, which parents can use without fear and intimidation as and when they need it. This service may function as a confidential preventative support service, which will uphold the families' rights for appropriate service, confidentiality and fairness. And the process will guarantee that it will never cause any disadvantage for contacting the service.

Independent complaints commission: The public child protection services may introduce a more effective and separate system to manage the grievances and complaints of the families independently. The independent complaint commission will ensure a confidential, safe and reassuring process in engaging with the families, while protecting the rights of the parents and children with utmost sincerity and fairness. The families in turn will have reason to have trust and confidence in the system.

7.4 Implications for knowledge development in social work professional education

The implications of the ICET mapping outcome linking the process of empowerment of the families with empowerment of the child protection service (Figure 3), have identified scope for more discussion for professional education and development of the services. This research has located the areas of professional education and development in three dimensional domains, individual professional; group/team and the management empowerment context. The Munro (2011) commission in the UK has gone further and made specific argument for developing a comprehensive generic professional capability framework, which will inform future social work training, post qualification professional learning and development, performance appraisal and a future performance improvement plan.

However, unlike other Anglophone countries, the statutory child protection authorities in most states in Australia do not primarily recruit social workers for frontline child protection work (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014; Ainsworth and Hansen, 2006). In this research, there were mixed responses which came from the families regarding their experiences with the social workers as child protection case workers. However, the findings from the primary data and mapping of the data have raised significant ethical professional competency and leadership issues, which may have wider implications for the social work profession. In approaching the professional concerns, in light of social work as a caring profession (Gray, 2010; Houston, 2009), there is an opportunity for discussion to impact, influence and empower the child protection policy and practice regimes in future.

Social work as a profession has been around for more than a hundred years and, by changing its scope and depth has maintained its core values of promotion of social justice and universal care and wellbeing (Sowers and Dulmus, 2008 p. ix). The history of innovations in view of diverse changing demands in human services has created another opportunity for social work to give new directions to the struggling child protection management process.

Payne's work (1997; 2014) offers an empowerment focused social construction approach drawing on lived experiences and caring professional values through mutual connections with clients in practical applications of social work theory in everyday practices. However, the Munro (2011 p.8) review commission expressed concerns that the centrality of relationship based caring practice approach has become obscured due to more focus on "prescriptions" (procedural approaches) rather than emphasis on building knowledge and skills, through to continuing professional development. The review highlights the value of taking one's own accountability of social workers' use of research evidence to form most appropriate practice approach, which reinforce the argument for industry (i.e. CPS)-academia partnership in an effort to impact and influence each other. The findings of this research have highlighted the

lived experiences and aspirations of the families to inform a framework of future service provision.

7.5 Conclusion

This research is not about judging the participant families' views and aspirations in terms of right or wrong perspectives, or criticising the public child protection services based on the views of the families; rather the parents' engagement and reflections through their participation in this research demonstrates the potential for positive outcomes through child protection intervention as also argued by Ghaffar et al. (2012). Building on past research, which recommended a relationally based family directed child protection approach, the study has aimed to gain feedback from the families regarding their experiences. The project's findings were mapped which has increased our understanding regarding the views and aspirations of the families, consistent with past research literature.

The experiences of the families with the public child protection services reflect their deep sense of disempowerment, which contributed to their alienation and risks of further alienation from the system. The thematic analysis and theoretical mapping of the findings have articulated a family directed pathway for their empowerment, which has not only linked it with the empowerment of the child protection services but articulated a three-dimensional staged process to reinforce the empowerment building plan. The findings have contributed to the discussion for a family informed child protection service consistent with the past research. The outcome of the research can be seen as a message from the families to the child protection system, policy makers and also the academic community to listen to their voices and respond appropriately (Ghaffar et al., 2012; Dale, 2004).

Empowering vulnerable families is a highly complex and sensitive task (Munro, 2010). However, the starting point shall be connecting with the families and listening to them. Their aspirations need to be reflected in the professional decisions and intervention that affect their lives. Working with the vulnerable families is not simply doing the statutory job of "getting things right" with a checklist based formulistic intervention (Harris, 2012; Laming, 2009), but structuring an evidence based humanistic pathway so that the targeted families have reasons to remain engaged with the system, based on the evidence of their lived experiences. The

demand for a more compassionate, competent and compatible CPS, as well as ongoing research and professional education and development to build the service, are further reinforced by increasing vulnerability in our families, amidst exposure to diverse adversities in the complex societal change process as discussed in Chapter 1 and acknowledged in literatures (Giddens, 2002; Tilbury et al., 2007; Dore, 2008; Parton, 2010; Basu, 2014).

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the complexity of recruiting participants in this specific research area is noted by other researchers as well, and this may restrict firm conclusions from the study. However, in a democracy each view counts; it is not a mechanical condition, which can be judged by number, but instead portrayed to be moral and rational and requires safeguards from the statutory establishment of liberties and freedoms, legal entitlements, and free participation (Sen, 1999 p. 10; The Museum of Australian Democracy, 2015). In this context, the views and aspiration of the small cohort of families does matter in making their voices heard and in addressing their needs in future. On a similar note, the lack of participation of Indigenous families in this research, despite concerted recruitment efforts, may reflect a sense of alienation of the Indigenous community, which warrants a more sensitive and culturally driven approach (such as involving Indigenous para-professionals) in managing their situation as is also reinforced by the work of Ivec et al. (2012).

The study suggests further research to explore the process to develop a broader and deepening understanding of the experiences of the families in building the discussion for family informed child protection practice, embedded in empowerment as a long-term vision. However, the gap lies on the issues in gathering adequate data due to several factors as also discussed in the methodology section (Chapter 3). Accordingly, the project attracts scholarly exploration to understand more about the general nature of the recruitment issue and the boundary factors (i.e. an independent/open recruitment drive or a process supported by the establishment) and its impact in the volume and quality of data to better prepare future researchers in approaching the research area.

Finally, the study suggests consideration to review the findings of this research as potential scopes for future implementation. This is to assert the need to re-vision child protection practice in empowering ways with parents in order to honour our responsibilities to the children and families. The following comments of a parent and the picture (Iqbal, 2015), as also presented in Chapter 5 and 1, reiterate the context, concept and vision of this research:

I believe if the child is at risk then it should be a wakeup call for the department to work with the parents to remove the risks; removing the child is very damaging and particularly for the parents

Figure 1: A parent risks her life in flood water to bring her child to safety.

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List of Appendices

Appendices 1

Interview Prompts

Interview Prompts

1. Experiences and feelings regarding background of involvement with the child protection services.
2. Experiences and feelings of pre-intervention help seeking attempts and the outcome.
3. Experiences and feelings if the family was consulted about any child protection concern, assessment process and if a safety plan was drawn up in the early intervention stage.
4. Overall experiences and feelings in the initial stage of the child protection services' involvement.
5. Experiences and feelings of any support offered to the family and child/children after the removal of their children.
6. Experiences and feelings of receiving parenting capacity building support like clear directions about parenting courses/training they needed to undertake or skills they needed to develop/improve to demonstrate their new/improved parenting skills.
7. Experiences and feelings of support in terms of care plan and action towards managing a care plan.
8. Experiences and feelings of parental and siblings contacts while child/children were in care.
9. Experiences and feelings of general wellbeing and support arrangements for the child/children while living in the care system.
10. Experience and feelings of communications and relationships with the child protection case workers/managers.
11. Experiences and feelings of any support plan and initiated action for future rehabilitation of child/children in parental care.
12. Overall thoughts, feelings and aspirations from the child protection services.

Appendices 2

Informed Consent Form

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Appendices 3

Informed Consent Form for Children

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Appendices 4

Human Research Ethics Committee Approval

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Appendices 5

Variation of Ethics Approval

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