



# Parent Experiences with the Child Welfare System: Validation of Surveys

## Assessing Interactions with Caseworkers and the Court System

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### Abstract

- This study tested the reliability and construct validity of two measures of parent experiences with distinct arenas within the child welfare system:
  - Experiences with caseworkers
  - Experiences with the legal system.
- Results revealed preliminary evidence of reliability and construct validity for both instruments assessing parent experiences of child welfare.

### Introduction

- There are limited tools available to assess the experience of parents with children in foster care.
- Parents navigating the child welfare system experience multiple interacting systems, including public and private agency systems, health systems, and the court system.
- We developed two new scales of parent experiences, including subscale domains reflecting underlying constructs within the systems affecting parents.

### Methodology

Data were collected in person via survey from 305 parents and caregivers with current or prior experience navigating the foster care system across 34 counties in one midwestern state. Data were collected by professional parent partners with lived child welfare experience.

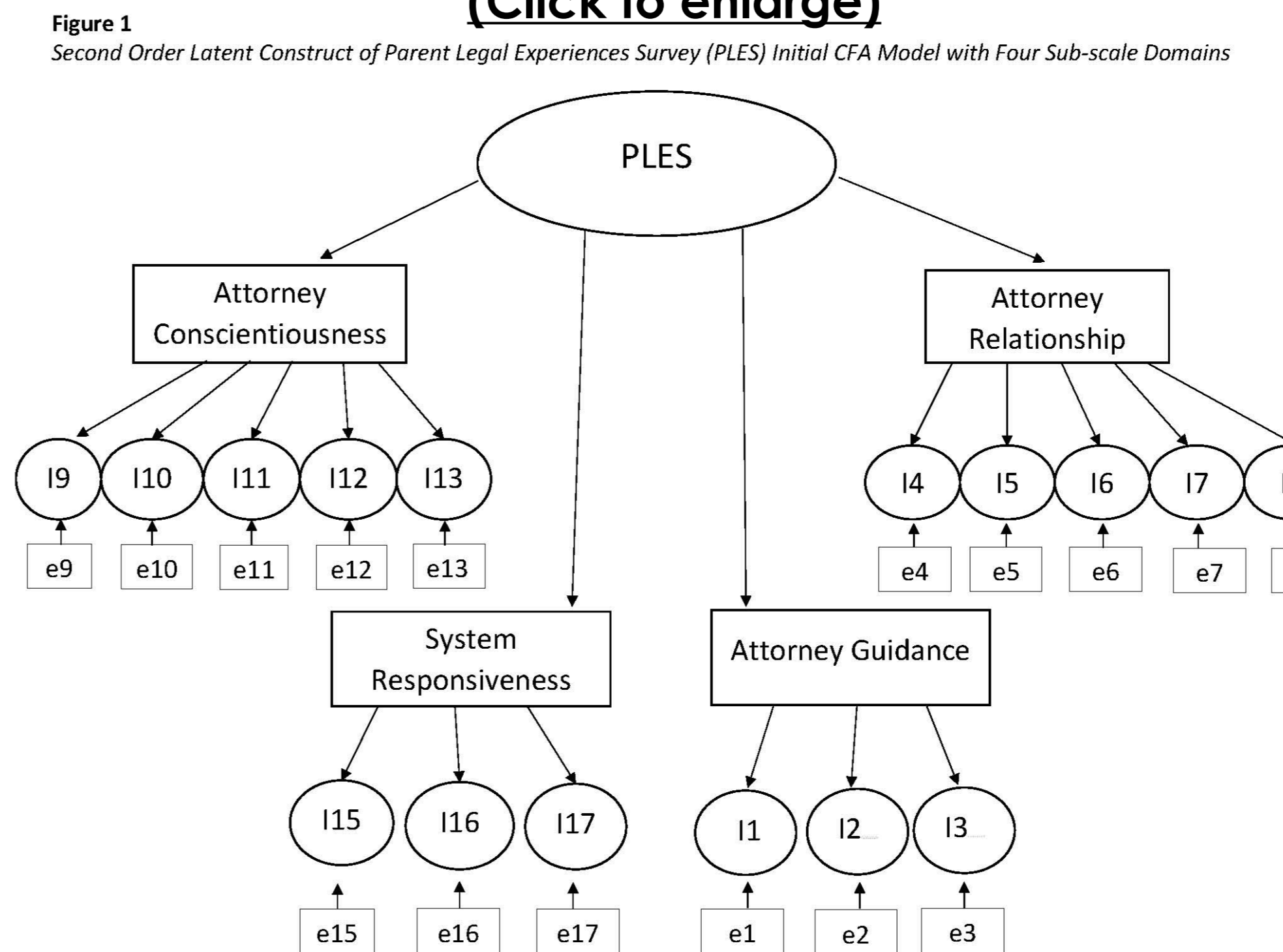
#### Measures:

- The Parent Legal Experiences Survey (PLES)**, a 16 item Likert-type survey was adapted from an instrument designed to evaluate child welfare workers' perceptions of the juvenile court system (Ellis, 2010).
  - The PLES was developed with four theorized subscales: 1) attorney conscientiousness, 2) attorney relationship, 3) attorney guidance, and 4) system responsiveness.
- The Parent Agency Caseworker Experience Survey (PACES)**, a 26-item instrument, was adapted from two existing instruments measuring parent satisfaction with public and private agency workers (Kapp & Vela, 2004; Harris, Poertner & Joe, 2000).
  - The PACES was developed with four subscales: 1) worker conscientiousness, 2) worker relationship, 3) worker sensitivity, and 4) worker communication.

#### Analyses

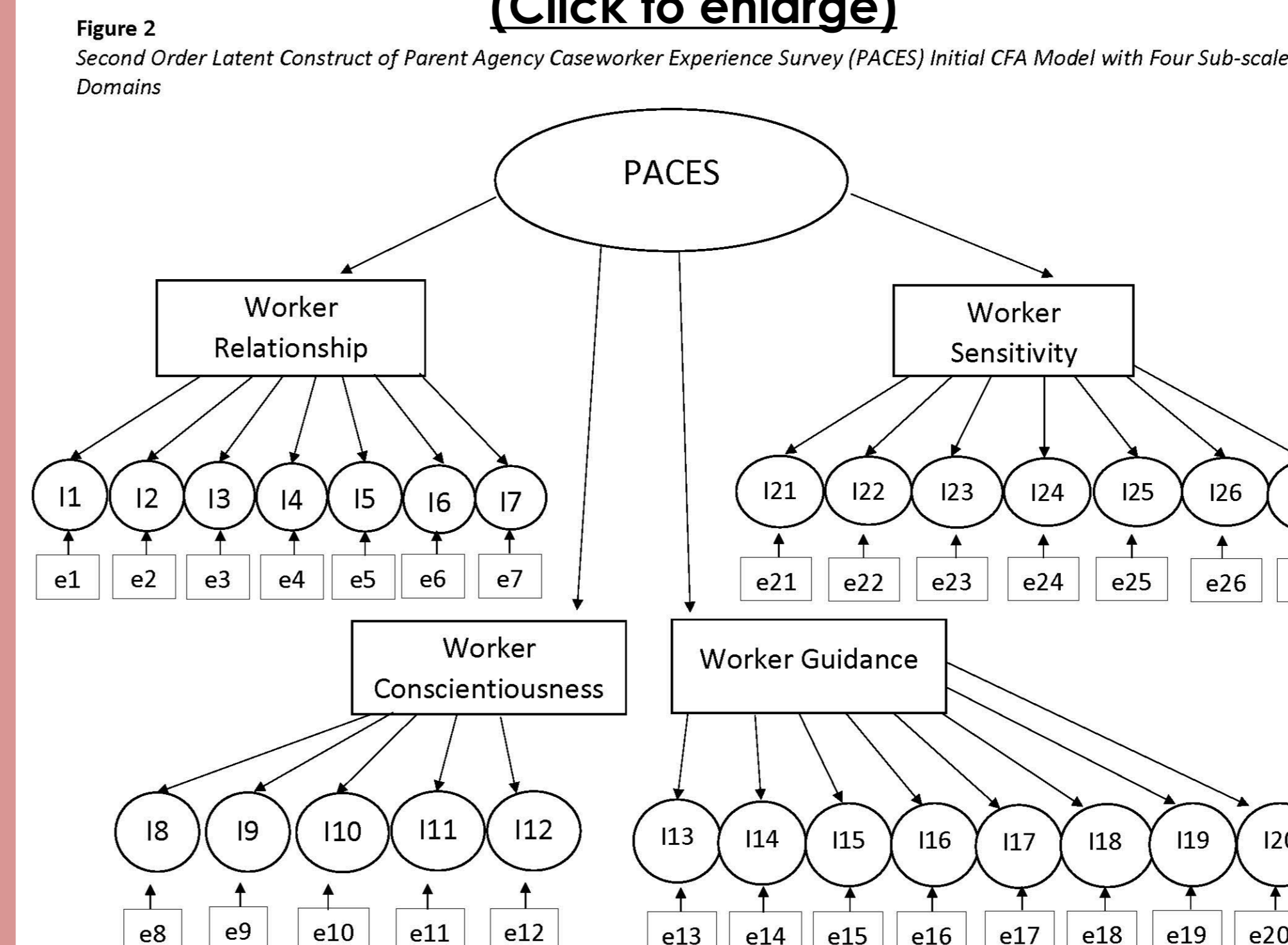
- Tests of construct validity and internal consistency reliability, including Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) and Cronbach's alpha were conducted.

(Click to enlarge)



Note. Upon review of the modification indices, the error variances for the following items were constrained for the final model: item 7 and item 8; item 16 and item 17.

(Click to enlarge)



Note. Upon review of the modification indices, the following error variances for the following items were constrained for the final model: item 13 and item 14; item 19 and item 20; item 23 and item 24; item 26 and item 27.

### Results

- Both measures demonstrated acceptable fit with statistically significant factor loadings for each item and sufficient reliability ([click to see table 1](#)).
- Although the PLES RMSEA fit index is inconsistent, this initial survey shows promising results.
- Planned additional data collection and replication of analyses will further establish evidence for these models.

### Conclusion

These new instruments provide reliable and valid measures of parent experiences with distinct aspects of the child welfare system and can offer system leaders valuable and actionable quantitative data to improve court and agency practices.

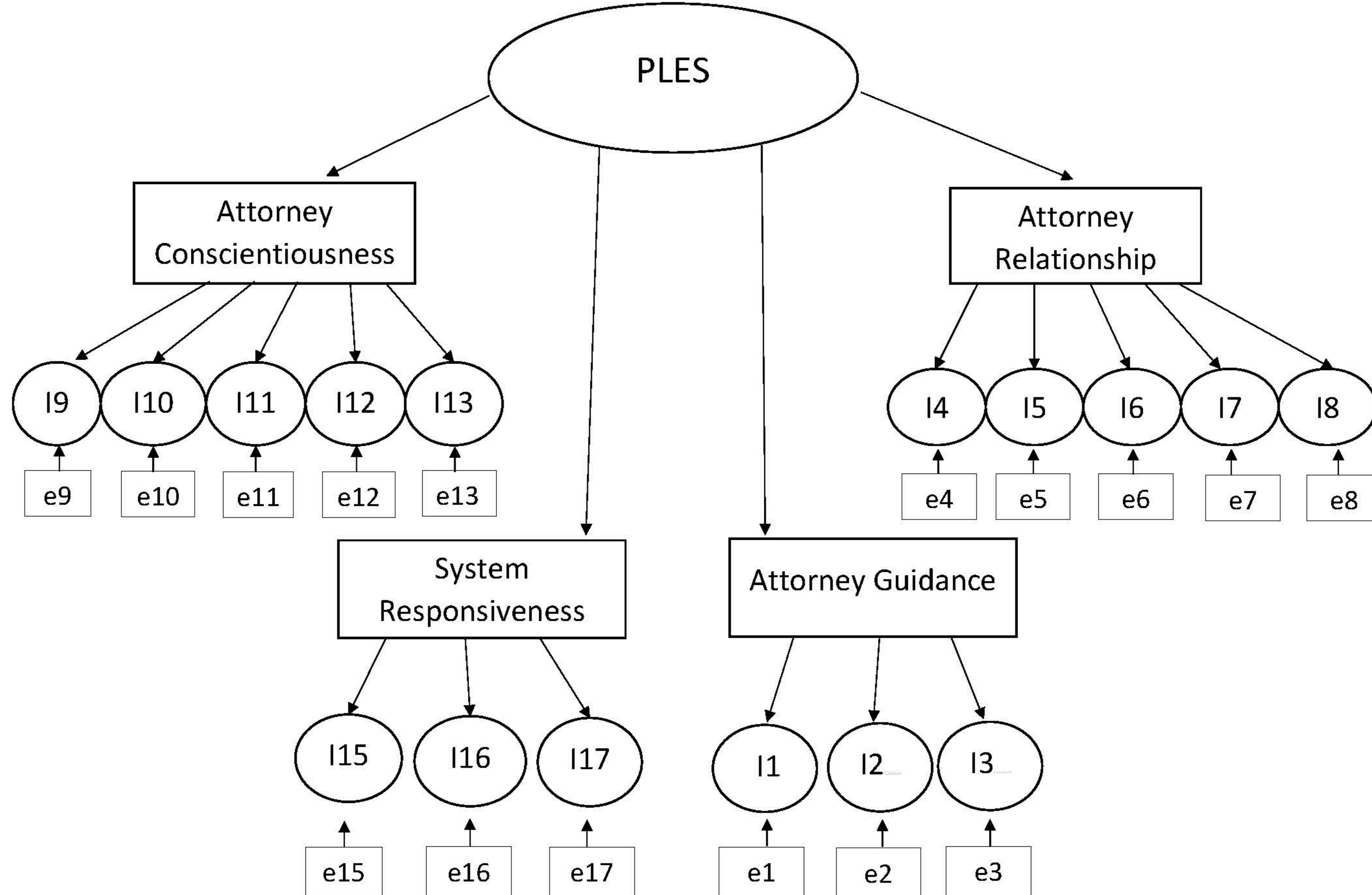
### Acknowledgements

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**Figure 1**

*Second Order Latent Construct of Parent Legal Experiences Survey (PLES) Initial CFA Model with Four Sub-scale Domains*



**Note.** Upon review of the modification indices, the error variances for the following items were constrained for the final model: item 7 and item 8; item 16 and item 17.

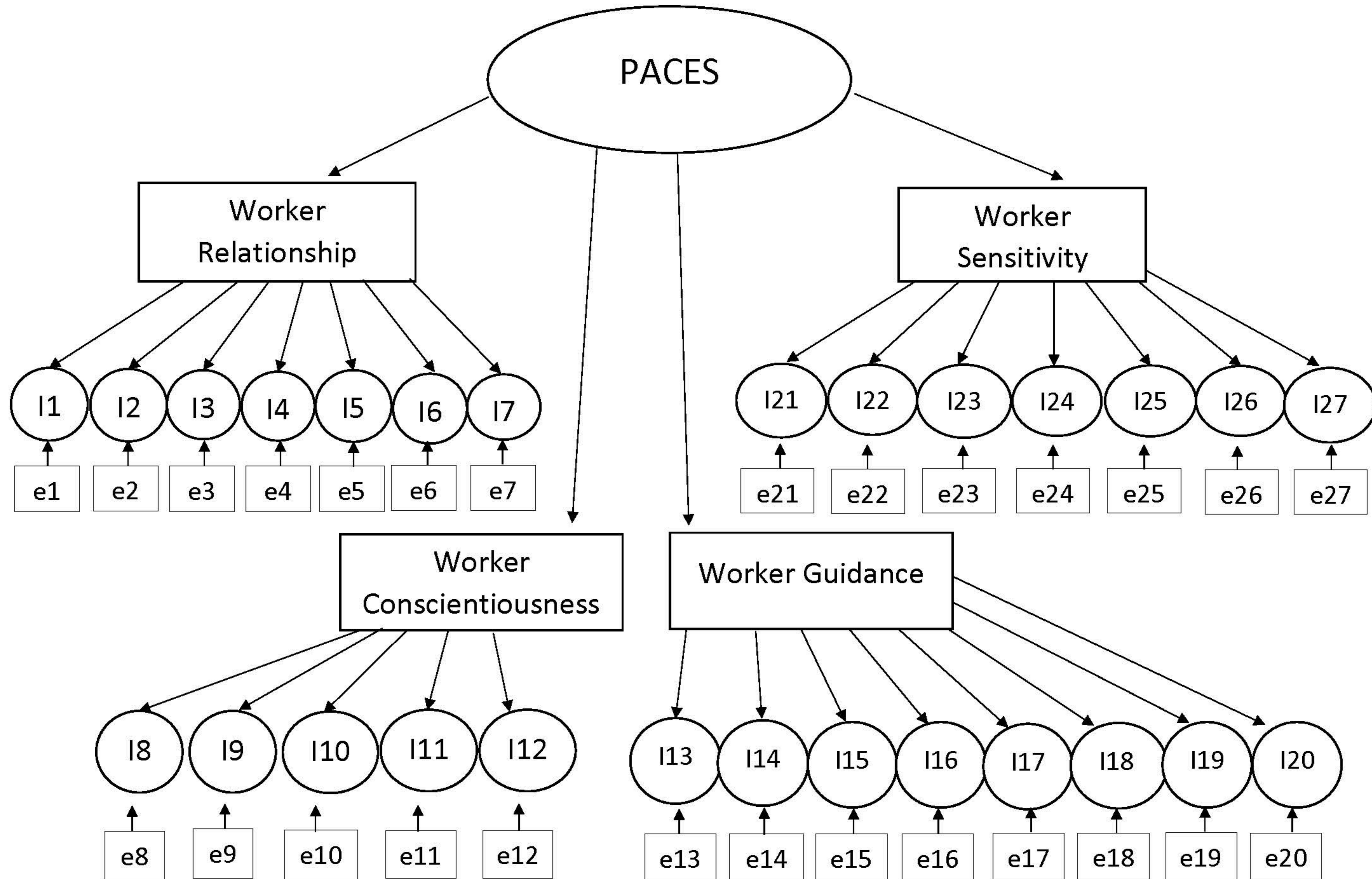
Table 2	
PLES Items and Factor Loadings. Items were assessed on a scale from (5) Strongly Agree, (4) Agree, (3) Neutral/Don't know, (2) Disagree, and (1) Strongly Disagree.	Final Factor Loadings
<b>Factor 1: Attorney Guidance</b>	.90
1. My attorney told me my rights.	.90
2. My attorney explains to me what will happen in court.	.95
3. My attorney explains to me the roles of the people in the courtroom.	.89
<b>Factor 2: Attorney Relationship</b>	.98
4. My attorney cares about me and my family.	.91
5. My attorney speaks up for me with other professionals involved in my case.	.91
6. My attorney calms my fears about what might happen to my children and me.	.91
7. My attorney takes the time to listen to my side of the story.	.94
8. My attorney involves me in decisions about my case.	.95
<b>Factor 3: Attorney Conscientiousness</b>	.98
9. When my attorney says she/he will do something she/he does it.	.95
10. My attorney returns my call.	.89
11. My attorney tells me what I can expect to hear in court about me, good and bad.	.92
12. My attorney/court personnel help me to understand the decisions being made about me and my family in court.	.93
13. My attorney gives enough time to my case.	.92
14. I know who to tell if I am unhappy with my attorney.*	--
<b>Factor 4: System Response</b>	.84
15. Court personnel respect my social, cultural, and/or ethnic background.	.92
16. The judge asks me whether I have questions or want to share any comments.	.79
17. The judge gives enough time to my case.	.82

\*Question 14 was omitted from the analysis as it did not align with the existing constructs.



**Figure 2**

*Second Order Latent Construct of Parent Agency Caseworker Experience Survey (PACES) Initial CFA Model with Four Sub-scale Domains*



**Note.** Upon review of the modification indices, the following error variances for the following items were constrained for the final model: item 13 and item 14; item 19 and item 20; item 23 and item 24; item 26 and item 27.



<b>Table 3</b>	
PACES Items and Factor Loadings. Items were assessed on a scale from (5) Strongly Agree, (4) Agree, (3) Neutral/Don't know, (2) Disagree, and (1) Strongly Disagree.	Final Factor Loadings
<b>Factor 1: Worker Relationship</b>	.94
1. My worker encourages me to discuss when things were better in my family.	.85
2. When my worker makes a mistake, she/he admits it and tries to correct the situation.	.90
3. My worker speaks up for me with other professionals involved in my case.	.92
4. My worker tries to understand what it is like to get your children taken away.	.87
5. My worker's expectations of me are reasonable.	.85
6. My worker listens to my side of the story.	.92
7. My worker cares about my kids.	.87
<b>Factor 2: Worker Conscientiousness</b>	.95
8. When my worker says she/he will do something she/he does it.	.91
9. My worker devotes enough time to my case.	.91
10. My worker tells me who I can contact for help when she/he is gone for more than a day or two.	.88
11. My right to make decisions about my children is respected whether they are in my care or in foster care.	.82
12. My worker gets me necessary services in a timely manner.	.89
<b>Factor 3: Worker Guidance</b>	.96
13. My worker returns my calls.	.82
14. My worker has experience helping with the kinds of problems that my family and I are having.	.86
15. I am involved in decisions made about my case.	.87
16. My worker is clear about what they expect of me.	.86
17. My worker respects my right to privacy.	.87
18. My worker includes me in decision-making	.93
19. My worker tells me what they plan to recommend in court- both negative and positive.	.87
20. The services and resources recommended will help me achieve my case plan goals.	.88
<b>Factor 4: Worker Sensitivity</b>	.95
21. My worker is helping me to address the safety concerns that caused me to become involved with child welfare.	.81
22. My worker calms my fears about what might happen to my children and me.	.91
23. My worker respects my social, cultural, and/or ethnic background.	.90
24. I felt comfortable talking with my worker about what my culture, ethnicity, and race have to do with my situation	.90
25. My worker speaks the language most appropriate for me and my family	.67
26. The agency or my worker has told me my rights.	.80
27. I know who to call if my rights were ignored.	.78

<b>Table 1</b>							
<i>Fit Indices for each Model tested for the Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of the PLES and PACES scales (n = 280)</i>							
Model Step	$\chi^2$	df	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Chronbach's Alpha
PLES Final Model w/ modification indices	495.64	98	< .001	.94	.93	.12	.98
PACES Final Model w/modification indices	937.60	351	< .001	.93	.93	.08	.98
<b>Note.</b> CFI, Comparative Fit Index; TLI, Tucker Lewis Index; RMSEA, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation. Modification indices for the final CFA model include added error paths between items: PLES Items 7 and 8; items 16 and 17; PACES Items 13 and item 14; item 19 and item 20; item 23 and item 24; item 26 and item 27.							