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# THE DISPROPORTIONALITY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM: SOCIAL WORKER PERCEPTION

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THE DISPROPORTIONALITY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN IN THE  
CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM: SOCIAL WORKER PERCEPTION

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Social Work

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by  
Marquita Marie Smith

June 2017

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June 2017

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored social workers perceptions of disproportionality of African American children in the child welfare system, with a particular focus how they felt child welfare agencies, and organization address the specific needs of African American children and families. Along with the types of services social workers felt could be implemented in order to address the concerns amongst African American families. Major findings in the research under represent the perspective of the social workers who work closely with these children and their families. The overall research method that was utilized in this study was qualitative by design. The data collection consisted of 11 face to face interviews with different types of social workers with current and past experiences working with African American children and families, in the child welfare agency. This research called for opinions, experience and personal beliefs from social workers. The survey consist of 13 open/close ended question and demographical questions that were personally asked to each social worker on a one on one bases. The results of this study identified African American children entering and staying in the system at longer rates, poverty, lack of resources in the community, distrust in the government and cultural competency as major contributing factors to disproportionality in the child welfare system. This study displayed a need for social workers to take on more of a strength based approach and remembering to model the NASW code of ethics when working with African American families. Recommendations for future studies include but

are not limited to: exploring options to have preventative services for African American families to be offered in their homes or alternatives to easy accessible services and to explore different strategies, tool and techniques in efforts to increase the relationships between the African American families and the social workers.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

Disproportionality amongst African American children has been one of many long lasting controversial issues (Mumpower 2003). Barth (2005) and Derezotes et al., (2005) and Hill (2006) have argued to whether or not overrepresentation is due: to racial/ethnic disproportionality, lack of cultural competence, institutional racism, personal biases, socioeconomic status, higher rates of poverty and maltreatment. Derezotes et al., (2005) contended that welfare policies, poverty status, level of income, lack of resources, community of residence, and single parenthood all affect the risk of a family's child welfare system involvement.

Derezotes et al., (2005) goes on to propose that the influences of the named factors creates an environment in which African American children are placed at higher risk of entering the child welfare system mainly due to the fact that this group represent a large percentage of the U.S. population that displays these characteristics. Hill (2006) argued that It has been documented throughout research that African American children are overrepresented at all decision making stages which consist of reporting, investigation, substantiation, placement into foster care and reentry into care.

According to Hill (2006) national data noted in 2005, African American children made up only 15% of the children living in the United State. Roughly 37% of the children in foster care were African American. The ratio of the two percentages mentioned was 2.43 which demonstrates that African American children are overrepresented in the nations foster care system.

Many researchers in the past have found that African American children experienced differences in the quality of services, fewer contacts by case workers and less access to drug treatment services, mental health/ family services (Mccroskey, 2008). Fluke et. al., (2010) suggested that Child welfare research consistently finds that minority children are at a disadvantage regarding the range and quality of services provided, the type of agency they are referred, efficiency to which their cases are handled, support their families receive and their outcomes (Fluke et. al., 2010).

Furthermore, African American children are still staying in the system longer than other children and having trouble with placement stability. When African American children go into foster care, they get stuck there 50 percent longer than children of other races (Ben, 2013). In Los Angeles County, the average foster care case lasts about a year and a half. However for African American children, it lasts more than two years (Ben, 2013). According to Roberts (2005) with the many teens that leave the foster care system a high percentage end up in prison. Congress estimated that about 20,000 young

people “age out” of foster care each year with a vast majority of the ones abandoned being African American teens (Roberts, 2005).

According to Alliance for Racial Equality in Child Welfare (2015) African Americans are more likely than their counterparts to be removed from their families and placed in foster care, remain in care longer and are less likely to exist foster care through reunification or other forms of permanency. For those who are not adopted or reunified, many remain in the system while experiencing multiple moves and often emotional, mental, education, and behavioral problems (USGAO, 2007).

Roberts (2005) argued that when children are seized from their parents, that, it creates a sense of vulnerability and betrayal in the children who rely on their parents for support. Roberts (2005) found that empirical studies show, that children in foster care suffer psychological harm once they are cut off from their families. According to Roberts (2005), “the nation’s foster homes, juvenile detention centers, and prisons house far too many children, and we know that most of them are Black” (p. 206).

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore social workers perceptions of disproportionality of African American children in the child welfare system, with a particular focus how they feel child welfare agencies, and organization address

the specific needs of African American children and families. Along with the types of services social workers feel could be implemented in order to address the concern amongst African American families. Major findings in the research under represent the perspective of the social workers who work closely with these children and their families. According to Hill (2006) research over time clearly shows there is no exact cause for this phenomenal just many theories and practices in place to decrease it. The causes of disproportionality are multifaceted since they operate at various levels: Individual, family, community, child welfare system, and social policies (Hill, 2006).

Over the years many state officials have really taken action and begin to realize that overrepresentation in the child welfare system is a huge issue nationwide. Growing numbers of advocates, child welfare administrators, and elected officials have recognized the need to reduce racial disparities and improve outcomes among children, youth and families of color. Many states have implemented numerous evidence -based programs like Team Decision Making, SafeCare, also collaborated with organization like Casey Foundation and Faith in motion and involved stakeholders to partner with families and communities to address the issues (Alliance for Racial Equality in Child Welfare, 2015).

Having the perspective from people how have direct experiences is an effective route to explore. More research needs to shy away from contributing factor of disproportionality and focus more on the specific needs of African American children and families once entering into the child welfare system. Less

focus on how this population enters into the system and more focus on keeping them out. Social workers in conjunction with an appointed Judge makes the final decisions as to whether or not the child should be removed from their home (Foster, 2012). Derezotes (2005) found that several researchers have suggested that caseworkers' characteristics and perceptions of their clients have influence over their decisions. On the other hand, others researchers found no association between caseworkers characteristics and where they chose to place a child.

Further research needs to place child welfare workers and community leaders in the spotlight. We have been provided with overwhelming research and theories related to disproportionality. Along with back and forth debates on the topic which all resulted in unclear reasons to why the overrepresentation exist and who is at the root of the problem. We live in a world where our bias and values, whether we expect it or not, weighs heavily on the decisions we make. The more the world is aware of the problem the faster we can come to an understanding.

Going further, we need more face to face interaction with the individuals with the power to remove the children from their homes. We need their assistance in helping us understand their ideology when it comes the decision process and method use to address their concerns. Roberts (2005) argued "Children fall through the cracks not because child welfare agencies are devoting too much to family preservation. Children fall through the cracks because agencies are devoting too much to child removal" (p.130).

The overall research method that was utilized in this research project is qualitative by design. The data collection consisted of 11 face to face interviews with different types of social workers with current and past experiences with African American children and families in the child welfare agency. The social workers represented were of varies demographic. This research called for opinions, experience and personal beliefs from social workers. The survey consist of 13 open/close ended question and demographical questions that were personally asked to each social worker on a one on one bases. Each participant was given a choice as to whether or not they wanted to be audio recorded and notes were also transcribed.

### Significance of the Study

This present study helps gain insight to the overrepresentation of African American children and how child welfare agencies and organization address the specific needs of African American children and their families, given from the perception of the social worker. This study provides social worker with a voice and others with a perspective of the concern. Social workers not only work closely with the children but are also very knowledgeable of practices and resources offered to African American children.

This study will also allow the social workers who views are clouded by stereotypes or personal judgment to redirect their belief systems. On the other

hand, the social workers may provide their insight that could contribute to the enhancing of different programs to assist in running them more efficiently. Social workers have the insight on how effective different programs could be when servicing different populations.

The dynamics of overrepresentation of African American children is so extreme and there will always be many ideologies, methodologies, theories and perspectives from individuals with legit research to support their argument. However, more research from the social workers who have hands on experience with African American children will be more prepared and knowledgeable on ways to lessen the many theories on contributing factors of disproportionality.

This present study may provide the social workers that are dedicated to helping the children and are still faced with the backlash, the ability to provide a different perspective. According to Blank (2017) “The Code of Ethics includes the principle that social workers should challenge social injustice—focusing primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other manifestations—and that their activities should promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity” (p.1) .

This present study is concentrated on asking: Disproportionality in the child welfare system: How social workers perception of how child welfare agencies and organization address the specific needs of African American children and families? Along with the type of services social workers feel are needed to address the concerns amongst African American families.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The literature reviews for this present study is focused on the disproportionality of African Americans in Child Welfare. This study will address the perception of social workers how child welfare agencies and organizations address the specific needs of African American children. The literature reviews that will be presented in this paper have two commonalities: one is that they all agree that the disproportionate representation of minority children in the child welfare system has been a topic of concern for many years. The second being that there are many theories and contributing factors to African American children being placed in foster care at twice the rates as other children (mainly Caucasian) in the United States.

In addition, with the use of national data along with the different examined methodologies, researchers have been unable to truly explain or find why this phenomenon exist. There are still many gaps in the literature and many researchers throughout the years have been creating ways to address those gaps. Over the course of the years, the more research that surface around disproportionality the more attention it has been brought to the communities, stakeholders and the legal system. Furthermore, the more collaborating that has

occurred nationwide the greater chances in an apparent decrease in negative data in all decision points surrounding the children in the child welfare system.

### Disproportionality of African American Children in the Child Welfare System

According to Mumpower and McClelland (2013) to show the scale of the problem in the United States during 2011, (the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service), Child Protective Service, agencies received an estimated 3.4 million referrals alleging child abuse or neglect, involving an estimate 6.2 million children. Mumpower and McClelland (2013) also pointed out, an estimated 57.6% of the referrals came from teachers, police officer, lawyer, social services staff, or others how had contact with the alleged victim as part of their jobs. Friends, neighbors and relatives submitted 18.2% of the reports. 21.5% of the victims were African Americans, 22.1% were Hispanic, and 43.9% were White (Mumpower and McClelland 2013).

Mumpower and McClelland (2013) found in their study of the methodological use of Signal Decision Theory (SDT) that in California African American children were disproportionately referred into the system at higher rates than white and Hispanic children. African American children were reported as having higher rates of incidence involving no referrals but of abuse/neglect. Mumpower and McClelland (2013) suggested that arguments have been made

on both sides as to whether blacks were over represented or under represented and how data themselves do not and cannot yield a definite answer.

Racial disproportionality has been well researched and known among child welfare researcher who have been attempting to explain the phenomenon (Foster, 2012). Foster (2012) found that in 2004 15% of the children in the US were African American, but 34% of the children in foster care in the US were African American. The ratio disproportionality was 2.26 in 2004. Foster (2012) has noted that states with more substantial reporting of African Americans, social worker took fewer children into protective custody and has lower racial disproportionality ratio for black children.

According to Foster (2012) factors that caused racial disproportionality in foster care populations all appeared amplified when African Americans make up the minority in the population. Some evidence indicated that caseworkers sometimes looked for reasons to remove black children and reasons not to take the white children (Foster, 2012). The same could be addressed where the state population of African Americans are larger, less opportunity for cross racial tension or misunderstanding. Whites may have more interaction with African Americans and less likely to rely on negative stereotypes children (Foster, 2012).

Dettlaf and Rycraft (2010) found that the common factor in research of the causes of racial disproportionality were very unclear. National data indicated that 32% of children in foster care are African American although African American children represent only 15% of the child population in the United States they

account for 25% of substantiated maltreatment victims (Casey Family Programs, 2006; Chibnall et al., 2003). According to Dettlaf & Rycraft (2010); Barth (1997) Data from the federally funded National Incidence Studies of Child Abuse found no statistically significant difference in overall maltreatment rates between African American and Caucasian families as well as moderate maltreatment rates.

Chibnall et al., (2003) argued that some theorist and researchers have found that disproportionality is a result of discriminatory practices against minorities with a particular focus on African Americans. Differential treatment by race was a huge factor in the over reporting of minority parent for cause that include child abuse and neglect. In the child welfare system Caucasian children have been known to receive better treatment and service compared to that of African American children. African American children in the child welfare system receive inferior treatment in terms of provision of both in home and adoption services, recommended versus actual length of places, worker contact and mental health services (Roberts, 2002).

Over-representation of African American children in the child welfare system is still a very complex problem, however many researchers have been taking steps to address the issues.

## Means of Addressing Issues of Disproportionality

The review of research focused on the Riverside County's 2013-2018 System Improvement Plan (SIP). SIP reflects feedback from more than 400 individuals from public and private agencies, Prevent Child Abuse Riverside County and many other community participant funded programs. Collaborative partnership with the Department of Public Social Services, Children's Services Division and Probation Department provided the necessary support for a comprehensive of services, resource, strengths and improvements needed to enhance on a key child welfare outcomes.

There were three areas that the stakeholders came up with that needed the most improvement and many positive outcomes. They are as followed: safety and timely reunification, increase placement stability and reducing reentry. To reduce timely reunification they offered evidence base programs through the integrated care services such as Team Decision Making, TDM a meeting convened by social workers and led by a trained CSD facilitators that involves families and community members to assist in making critical decisions about child's placement, reunification permanency and safety planning.

Many other programs have been put in place like, Wraparound and Faith in Motion to address the overrepresentation of African American children in child welfare system. Riverside County developed a program called Racial Disparity and Disproportionality Project Core Work Group (Riverside County SIP, 2012).

The RDD project staff meet once a month to discuss outcomes and needed changes. The program offers parent support to families through one on one mentoring sessions, parenting support classes and multi week structured group discussion.

One of the many improvements Riverside County displayed was an increase of about 7% from 2008-2012, from January 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012, 69.1% of African American children in out of home care for 12 to 24 months experienced two or fewer placements thus exceeding the National Standards of 65.4%. The SIP provides evidence through the data that Riverside County is making every efforts to not only in address disproportionality but actively making changes throughout Riverside County.

Another way of addressing the concern comes from cultural competency training. Culture competency along the years have been a cause for concern for the social workers and how they approach disproportionality in the child welfare system (Hall and Lindsey, 2016). There has been training courses implemented into the field nationwide allow for individuals to openly discuss the topic of race. Having a healthy sense of racial and ethnic identity needs to be fostered in the classroom (Ebony Hall and Shelia Lindsey, 2016).

Many are taking action to address the pros and cons of social workers not being aware of their judgments. The competency of social workers is limited when they do not possess tools of acknowledgment that can affect them when working with diverse populations (Hall and Lindsey, 2016). Teaching students to

be mindful of and sensitive to issues, from potential language barriers to recognizing various religious sects, plays a role in effective practice (Hall and Lindsey, 2016).

In Chibnall et al., (2003) study they found that participants felt as though their colleagues within their agency, across racial/ethnic groups and job categories, possessed preconceived ideas or biases towards minorities, mainly African American. The African American participants felt their Caucasian counterparts lacked exposure, understanding of cultural norms and practices in which they felt contributes to the Caucasian staff racial bias interfering with good decision making (Chibnall et al., 2003).

Knowing Who You Are was developed by Casey Family Programs to help case workers explore their own racial and ethnic identity, while educating them of the importance of healthy racial and ethnic identity formation among children in substitute care (Case Family Programs, 2013).

According to Duarte and Summer (2012) Santa Clara County, implemented a three-pronged approach to reducing disproportionality and disparities for both African Americans and Latinos along the child welfare continuum by synthesizing leadership, collaboration and data driven decision making .Santa Clara County's data driven approach followed the theoretical framework that children of color tend to penetrate farther into the child welfare system and remain longer based on decisions made at each stage of a case (Duarte and Summer, 2012).

Based upon implementing the three pronged approach, Santa Clara was successful in reducing some of the disparities treatment with the child welfare system. They found that insight into how individuals within a system can contribute to system change efforts through awareness, participation analysis openness and leadership (Duarte and Summer, 2012).

Dettlaf and Rycraft (2010) designed a study to develop a deeper understanding of disproportionality from the views of the legal community, who are critical stakeholders in the child welfare. Dettlaf and Rycraft (2010) argued that studies that set out to identify the contributing factors of disproportionality have relied primarily on analyses of state and national child welfare data sets and have often produced inconsistent findings. Dettlaf and Rycraft (2010) examined how the existing literature demonstrated a critical gap in the research by failing to include the perspectives of external stakeholders in efforts to understand this complex phenomenon. They expressed how having the engagement of external stakeholders in efforts to address disproportionality could provide the opportunity to obtain critical insight necessary to understand and address the issue.

Dettlaf and Rycraft (2010) commented that although child welfare agencies are the first responders in cases of alleged maltreatment, without the sanction of the court, children cannot be placed in foster care or returned to their homes. As a result, the legal community has significant influence on child welfare outcome and it's a major stakeholder in the issue of disproportionality. Child welfare couldn't resolve issues alone and it would take the commitment from

other stakeholders such as service agencies, the courts, law enforcement, foster parents and many more leader beside the small sample size in their study to make a change (Dettlaf and Rycraft 2010). The two researchers also laid claim that engagement amongst stakeholder could facilitate collaborative relationships that may implement strategies to address disproportionality.

### Theories of Disproportionality

There are many theories that researchers around the world have proposed in an attempt to explain the over-representation of African American children in the child welfare system and a few are as followed. The first theory widely explained the disproportionate needs of African American children and families is poverty. Poverty impacts many of the families' abilities to manage their day to day and places multiple stress factors on their decisions. According to Chibnall et al., (2003) African-American families, are more likely to be poor than are non-minority groups which make them more vulnerable to social problems, including child abuse and neglect, domestic violence and substance abuse, etc. In addition, African American families live in resource poor communities and communities isolated areas that patiently offer fewer services along with support (Chibnall et al., 2003). Poverty has had a persistently strong relation to minority status in the United States.

According to Fluke et al., (2010) and Census Bureau (2007) African American children are more than three times as likely to live in poverty as non-Hispanic White children and up to 14 times more likely to live in neighborhoods characterized by concentrated childhood poverty than are their White counterparts. Raphael (2012) noted that data from the US General Accountability Office (GAO) documented that African American children in foster care found that 23% of African Americans lived below poverty levels compared with 6% of White children. The rate of single-parent families also related to poverty was higher for African Americans. African American children have repeatedly shown to have longer stays in poverty and the lowest exit rates from poverty (Fluke et al., 2010). Studies show that there are a high reporting of African American children for neglect from school personnel. According to data from the National Incidence Studies NIS-3, children from families with annual incomes below \$15,000 were 22 times more likely to experience harm and have higher rate of maltreatment (Fluke et al., 2010; Chibnall et al., 2003 ).

The second theory is racial bias in the child welfare system and amongst child welfare professionals. The decision to place a child in foster care often depends on the nature of the caseworker's assessment of family safety/ risk and caseworker's decision-making proclivities (Fluke et al., 2010). Fluke et al., (2010) suggested that there are possibilities that some child welfare staff may have biases concerning families of color, which could affect their decision making at every point of the decision making process.

In contrast, Fluke et al., (2010) found that discriminatory practices against African American children and families by child welfare and other organizational personnel are not necessarily intentional. Many child welfare workers assume that the poorer communities have higher risk of maltreatment so removing the children appear in their eyes to be of the benefit of the child (Fluke et al., 2010). Fluke et al., (2010) argued that

inequitable practices by outside agents operating within their respective institutions that interact with the child welfare system (e.g., hospitals, law enforcement, education, etc.) may lead to greater numbers of children of color referred to the child welfare system (p.22).

Cross suggested (2008) the complexity of the issues lies within the workers who are a part of the child welfare system not setting aside their own bias and deciding to incorporate their own morals when pertaining to the wellbeing of the children. Social worker not being cognizant of their own biases often time approach a situation causing more damage than good. Cross (2008) explained that the national incidence studies of child maltreatment found that all race experience child maltreatment at roughly the same rate. Many of the social workers were under the impression they were providing justice by removing African American and Native Americans from their current environment not realizing their own fears, prejudices and ignorance to the cultural differences.

The third theory explains family needs for services and lack of community resources. According to Rivaux et al., (2008) there is a lack of understanding of

the relationship between family need and family poverty. Needs occupy a larger spectrum in that, families may just be unaware of available resources and services that will provide information and service to meet their needs (Rivaux et al., 2008). According to Rivaux et al., (2008) unnecessarily removing a child from their home could be potentially be prevented if low- income families had access to available services at the same rate as they are to those making higher incomes.

Research has shown a consistent pattern of inequitable resources available to families of color in the child welfare system, such as housing, counseling and child care services (Fluke et al., 2010). Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare (2009) suggested that researchers found a lack of an agency infrastructure, including policies, practices and resources, which promoted equitable outcomes for African American families and children.

In term of other theories, Ecological system theory is the theory that could be utilized to guide the conceptualization of this current study. Urie Bronfenbrenner created the ecological system theory. Urie believed that a person's development was affected by everything in their surrounding their environment (Siporin, 1980). Urie saw the need to divide a person's environment into five different levels: Microsystems, Mesosystems, Ecosystems, Macro systems and Chronosystem. Each of these levels have the potential to affect a child's development in either a positive or negative way. For African American children being disproportionally represented in the child welfare system

show obvious signs that their system has been broken. Each level acts as a rippled effect because failed interaction in the first level often creates damaging environmental connection in the others.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore disproportionality in the child welfare system: How social workers perception of how child welfare agencies and organizations address the specific needs of African American children and families? Along with the type of services social workers feel are needed to address the concerns amongst African American families. This chapter outlines the research methodology of this study which consists of: The study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subject and data analysis.

#### Study Design

The specific purpose of the proposed study is exploratory by design but had different components to be evaluated in regards to social workers perception of disproportionality in the child welfare system. There is little research conducted on social workers perception of how they view the accuracy or lack thereof pertaining to agencies and organizations addressing the specific needs of African American children and families.

This research used qualitative design to conduct the study. The qualitative approach focused on a face to face interview with social workers and questions personally created to address the issue at hand. Qualitative research studies help with obtaining a more profound look into social workers knowledge and experiences with disproportionality of African American children and families in the child-welfare system.

### Sampling

This study utilized a non-probability sample design to choose participants. The research demanded this type of sampling plan to gain up close and personal understanding of the social workers views on different aspects of disproportionality amongst African American children in the child welfare system. This research included a personal survey interview or face to face interview with 11 social workers with various experiences and demographics. The survey method consisted of 13 question asked to each participant on a one on one basis.

The qualifiers consisted of participants employed as a previous or past social worker with previous or past experience working with the African American children and families. Several of the social workers interviewed were promoted to a higher position such as administrators or directors in various organizations. This researched called for this particular sample size because they provide insights on

how agencies/organization addressed the specific needs of this population and based upon their own experiences what they felt needed to be done to improve this phenomenon.

This sample size had experience utilizing the many programs implemented to reduce disproportionality so they provided insight on the benefits or lack thereof. Participants were recruited for this study, through active engagement throughout the communities of Riverside and other parts of Southern California.

#### Data Collection/ Instrument

The survey used in this study explored disproportionality from the lens of the social workers and how they felt the child welfare agencies and organizations are addressing the specific needs of African American children and families. The data collected for the study was conducted by implementing a personal survey interview which included 11 participants. Observations of each participant was an important component in gathering the data.

There were 13 personal created questions being asked consisting of both open-ended and close-end questions (Appendix A). The survey instrument was divided into two sections. The first section: Demographic information, items 1-6, addressed the different ages, ethnicity origin, and education: highest degree or level of school you have completed? Years of experience, job title, and gender.

The second section: items 7-13 were open-ended questions that focused on the social workers views on disproportionality, current implemented programs, awareness of cultural competency, bias and other components to addressing the concern. The Open-ended questions are more tolerated through interviews due to the fact that the respondents would be more convenient at expressing their long answers orally than in writing (Sincero, 2016).

In honor of informed content, the participants were made aware of the discussion during the one on one interview. The interview was recorded upon his/her consent and notes were taken in order to efficiently grasp their responses. The duration of each session lasted about 30-45 minutes and all interviews were executed with in a month's time. Reliability was easy to test because each person responds from their own experience and knowledge.

### Procedure

The data collected for the study was conducted by the use of a personal survey interview (face to face) which included 11 participants. Participants were recruited for this study, through active engagement throughout the communities of Riverside and other parts of Southern California. The survey method consisted of 13 questions that were asked to each participant on a one on one basis. The qualifiers consisted of participants employed as a previous or past social worker

with previous or past experiences working with the African American children and families.

Several of the participant although were still social worker by degree/ trade now held higher position such as administrators or directors in various organizations. The participants were made aware that the discussion during the one on one interview would be audio recorded (upon his/her approval) and notes would be taken in order to efficiently grasp their responses. Each interview were conducted in a comfortable setting where there were no distractions and freedom for the participants to comfortably verbalize their thoughts. At the end of each interview an incentive of \$20.00 gift card to Starbucks were given, in efforts to show appreciation for their time.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

Each participant received a verbal and written description of the questions asked. The participants were given a consent form in order to participate in the survey. They were informed that the information chosen to be disclosed was strictly confidential. Upon graduation from the Master's Program, the participants will be offered to have their personal audio recordings to keep or opt. to have the information erased. Lastly, the participant were informed of their rights to withdraw from the interview at any time.

## Data Analysis

For the data analysis, all the information from the notes and audio tape were collected and both reviewed. Qualitative research focuses on observation and the researchers are able to have in-depth conversations with the participants to gain a better understanding of their concerns. According to CSULB (2016) perspective, Qualitative research aims to get a better understanding through firsthand experience, truthful reporting, and quotations of actual conversations. It aims to understand how the participants derive meaning from their surroundings, and how their meaning influences their behavior.

For this study following the five steps to analyzing qualitative data was beneficial. According to O'Connor and Gibson (1998) there are five steps to data analyzing: 1) organize the data, 2) Finding and Organizing Ideas and Concepts, 3) Building Over-Arching Themes in the Data, 4) Ensuring Reliability and Validity in the Data Analysis and in the Findings, 5) Finding Possible and Plausible Explanations of the Findings. Organizing the data around the premise of the overall research question. Finding and Organizing Ideas and Concepts consist of looking for recurring words or phrases thorough out the different interviews. Building Over-Arching Themes in the Data consist of each of the response categories has one or more associated themes that give a deeper meaning to the data (O'Connor and Gibson, 1998).

Ensuring Reliability and Validity in the Data Analysis and in the Findings, with this research topic reliability is more of an identified component. Finding Possible and Plausible Explanations of the Findings. During the final stage of the analysis, it is important to verifying the finds, find the explanations of the results and relate those finding back the context (O'Connor and Gibson, 1998).

### Summary

The implications of the findings are an important part of the final report (O'Connor and Gibson, 1998). By the end of the methods section, According to (O'Connor and Gibson, 1998) five step data analysis, there should be clearer implications as to whether or not social workers perceptions can provide alternative ways to addressing the need of this population, outside of the already services or programs previously been implemented. On the other hand, the finds may suggest that the services and programs already in place are effective in cratering to the needs of African American children and families.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

#### Introduction

In this chapter, the demographics and perceptions from social workers in regards to disproportionality of African American children in the child welfare system will be discussed. There are particular focuses as to how the social workers felt child welfare agencies, and organization address the specific needs of African American children and families. Along with the types of services social workers felt could be implemented in order to address the concern amongst African American families. Major findings in the current research under represent the perceptions of the social workers, who work closely with these children and their families. In this research, social workers shared their past and present experiences working for a child welfare agency and through their responses common themes were revealed.

#### Results

##### Demographics

There was a sample size of 11 social workers that were interviewed face to face for this particular study. This sample included 2 men and 9 women from diverse ethnic back grounds. The ethnic origin of the participants included 4

African Americans, 2 Caucasian, 3 Hispanic/ Latin descent and 2 participant whom identified under more than one race. The average age of the participants interviewed was 45 years old. The youngest participant was 34 years old and the oldest participant was 58 years old.

Of the participants interviewed, 1 participant had completed their bachelor degree, 8 participants had completed a master degree program and 1 participants had completed a doctorate degree program. In terms of years of experience each participant had in the field of social work, the median was 19 years. The least amount of experience as a social worker was 9 years and the greatest amount was 25 plus years. A few of the participants have progressed in their careers over the years and currently hold different job titles. A few of the current job titles include children social service supervisors, program specialist and mental health service supervisors.

#### Perceptions about Disproportionality of African American Children in the Child-Welfare System

The first interview question discussed the participants' perceptions on the disproportionality of African American children in the child welfare system and whether they felt it exist or not. All 11 participants not only agreed that disproportionality amongst African American exist in the child welfare system but

this population stays in the system longer than many other ethnic groups. One participant stated

disparities and systemic racisms that plays huge roles in how African American children and families transition through the child welfare system. It also impacts African American children entering in the system, longer stay and facing challenges with permanence (Personal Interview, June 24, 2016).

Similarly, another participant, pointed out that, “Only 5% of the population in my county are actually African American but yet we have around 30% under 18 children are in foster care” (Personal Interview, June 24, 2016).

#### Reasons for the Disproportionality of African American Children in Child Welfare System

The second interview question discussed the participants’ perceptions as to why they thought African American children are placed in the child welfare system at higher rates than Caucasian or children of other ethnicities. There were many different responses to this particular question and many participants called it, “challenging to respond to.” Major themes that were identified amongst the 7 out of 11 of the participants were as followed: lack of culture competency amongst social workers, poverty with in the African American communities, race, lack resource and biases. For example, one of the Participants stated

46.5%-46.9% single mothers are in poverty. Poverty is real, many middle class white social workers have white privilege and don't understand the African American culture enough to provide accurate services. Also, many white families have more access to resources in comparison to poor African American families (Personal Interview, June 24, 2016).

Several of the participants felt that personal bias cloud the judgment of social workers when making the decision to remove the children from their home. This Participant explained, "We have African American social worker who refuse to take African American children into custody which doesn't protect children and not doing them any favors. It's an overreaction to disproportionality" (Personal Interview, June 24, 2016).

Four participants related higher rates due to self-defeatist attitude, public figures views (school officials, law enforcement, etc.) and substance abuse in the home. One participant shared how the social justice system provides unfair treatment to African American boys. That same participant reported their experiences with having young African American boys on her caseload that were also on probation.

I have witnessed other race boys get off with a slap on the wrist for petty crimes, where my client had warrants from 2 years ago be placed in a juvenile detention center with probation. The warrants were not current (Personal Interview, June 24, 2016).

A participant then related higher rates to parents having many crime / drug related offenses and many families choosing not to adopt African American children. “People chose not to adopt or foster African American children. I have some children that have been in placement for 6 years. Parent loss rights, not a good adoptable age, etc” (Personal Interview, June 24, 2016).

Two participants shared similar views in that, the culture of professionals such as doctors, school officials and social workers have to change the way they view African American children in comparison to other ethnicities. One participant expressed, “In the case where substance abuse is involved social workers tend to believe African American families need more time in care so it’s safer to leave their children in the system longer” (Personal Interview, June 26, 2016). That same participant continued to share, “We know and are taught you can’t resolve a substance abuse issue in 7-8 months but we believe white families can but for some reason we think it takes AA families 12 months to reach same level” (Personal Interview, June 26, 2016).

#### Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Evidence-Based Programs

The third interview question discussed the participants’ perceptions on evidence based programs (Team Decision Making, Safe Care, etc.) and how they may have changed the way agencies provide services to African American children and their families. In terms of evidence based programs all 11 participants referenced Team Decision Making due to that program being widely

utilized when working with African American children and their families. Parent Partner Program which is a program that assist parents transition through the system and children family team meeting were also briefly identified by two participants. Five out of eleven participant found programs TMD's beneficial and a great tool to assist in reunification. The few participants who were in agreement felt as though with the implementation of TDM's children show greater placements with relative/ kin ship verse foster care. In addition, group a of participants felt that TDM's allows everyone (social workers, community members, teacher, family members, parents, etc) to not only collaborate but to see things from different perspectives on how to better assist child (ren).

Everyone is granted the opportunity to understand the families' culture and allows for biases to be identified along with collective ideas to help families. One Participant expressed, "TDM forces social workers to look at things from a team perspective. Our goal is to educate families to problem solve use critical thinking" (Personal Interview, June 26, 2016). Another participant shared, "I am currently a community partner for TDM's and it goes across the board for all races. The meetings are a good process because it gives the family a chance to be real people" (Personal Interview, June 26, 2016).

On the other hand, 5 out 11 participant found the programs like TDM's as non-effective and just a like many of them stated "just a box to check off." One participant expressed, "Human nature with tasks, heavy caseloads, high stress the TDM became a nuisance for many" (Personal Interview, June 26, 2016).

Many participant felt as though the TDM's were useless because it's challenging finding community member or family member that wanted their homes invaded by county workers. In agreement, one participant shared "If the child is going to be removed it is already pre-determined before the parent gets there. The Family having the opportunity to be heard is sort of benefit" (Personal Interview, June 26, 2016). Another participant stated, "The programs are only beneficial if outcomes are being changed" (Personal Interview, June 26, 2016). This particular participant shared

Permanency in 12 months not many counties are doing well and if we aren't getting children to permanency we aren't doing well. Riverside is the only county above national standards, permanency in Orange County estimated 260 children and Riverside County 11057 children (Personal Interview, June 28, 2016).

#### Need Services, Policies or Programs to Address Disproportionality

The social workers provided several different responses to the type of services, policies or programs needed to address disproportionality. The commonalities for the various responses was that most of the social workers agreed that some type of cultural training was needed whether it was humility, competence, diversity or sensitivity. Many social workers in the research felt as though the overall members of child welfare agencies need to have a better understanding of every culture when determining how to go forward with

providing services, etc. Two of the participants discussed the importance of having mentor programs in place, especially for the African American boys. The two participant expressed, “African American father are missing from the home and many of young African American boys are becoming a part of the juvenile justice system” (Personal Interview, June 28, 2016). Other needed services mentioned by the participants was transportation and the need to create more services in the low income communities.

Several of the participants shared how many African American communities lack adequate transportation and many of the services are not readily accessible. Another Participant stated

Transportation is huge, if they can't get there then they are not going to go or put in the effort to get there. The programs that you as a parent are demanded to go to should have shuttle bus provided for the parents to attend as well as child care. Incorporate all the services in the same area for easy access. You take away excuses when you provide easies access to the programs (Personal Interview, June 28, 2016).

One participant expressed, “In my personal experiences that having more African American social workers working with African American children and families will serves as the best alternative (Personal Interview, June 24, 2016). This particular participant shared the opposite view, “Hiring more African American to work with African American children/families can be problematic because you are assuming I can work with that group because I am African

American. Other race may be more unbiased with your race” (Personal Interview, 2016).

### Cultural Competencies Training to Assist with African American Children and Families

The participants were asked as to whether or not they received any types of training to assist in working with African American children in the child welfare system. Two out of eleven participants stated that they couldn't recall having any form of cultural competency training. One participant shared “When I was first hired my director focused on what skills I could bring to the table,” (Personal Interview, June 24, 2016). On the other hand, nine out of eleven participants expressed that they received cultural competence training during induction but further training was optional or conducted annually. Another Participant stated

I was hired in 1995 so that is when I took the cultural competency course.

There are ongoing training you can take and they are optional but nothing specific to AA parse more like people belief it is just general.” Similarly,

another participant shared, “You have to take the training its mandatory.

Core mandating trainings online: safety, sexual, abuse, culture, you never know. You have to have 20 hours of training every 2 years (Personal Interview, June 26, 2016).

Some Participants displayed a pessimistic perspective on the cultural competency training as a whole. This particular participant stated

How about we stop teaching people cultural competency because in my opinion we are just teaching stereotypes. Anytime you make a general statement about any race/ nationality, you are creating stereotypes about that culture; we should instead train people to go in and ask the right questions to get an idea as to what that person's culture is about (Personal Interview, June 26, 2016).

One participant shared

Recognizing that I can't teach you about your culture let alone someone else culture. Cultural humility is important you have to know that you know nothing about some until you actually sit down with them (Personal Interview, June 26, 2016).

#### Race/Ethnicity/Culture into Consideration at Key Decision Points

The responses for social workers taking race/ethnicity/culture into consideration at key decision points in African American children journey through the child welfare system were split into three categories yes, no and uncertain. Three participants responded "yes" to the question asked. These three participants' felts as thought African American social workers dedicated more time to trying to locate kin, family or other placement than other race of social workers. For example, Participant 2 stated

I see this more with social workers who are African American in regards to my staff right now, I have 5 and 3 of them are African American. I see

them making more an effort to locate kin or family. Verse my other 2 staff members that doesn't make that sort of expert and work as hard with this group (Personal Interview, June 24, 2016).

Participant 6 shared

I think African American social workers take more consideration and comfort levels are higher when children are placed with their own. However, due to a limited number of African American foster parents many social workers are left with limited options. African American relatives give up on visit, they no show, no call, back in rehab, etc. it is a lot going on with the African American community when their children come in to placement" (Personal Interview, June 28, 2016).

Four participants responded "no" to this question. They felt as though social workers make decision based upon their unconscious bias, lack of experience with this particular culture and being unaware of their white privileges. Participant 5 shared, "I think that it is really hard for a lot of Social workers who have not been parents and not lived through poverty or life experience to take into consideration race/ethnicity/ culture". (Personal Interview, June 28, 2016). Another four participants shared similar perspectives in that they were unsure as to how to respond to this question. They all felt as though a team approach should be taken when considering placement or even removal of a child from the home. In addition, they felt a team approach should be taken when social workers are working with a culture they are unfamiliar with. Other social workers

may have more experience that could prevent that social worker from making a wrong decision such as removing the child from the home. Participant 3 shared

Some social workers would see a dirty house and remove the child from the home immediately. African American children are removed from the home due to the parent's substance use of marijuana, meanly a Caucasian mother is addicted to prescription medication and nothing happens (Personal Interview, June 28, 2016).

#### Difficulties African American Families Have Accessing Support Services

When participants were asked the difficulties that they have observed with African American Families accessing support services, nine out of eleven participants attribute the issues to lack of adequate transportation, finances, support system, low employment rate, past trauma, inability to articulate, educational disparities, distrust in the system, less available services in their communities, institutional racism, stigmas of seeking assistance outside of their communities and disbelief in mental health services. One participant stated,

I worked in the north region where 99% of the population were African American and there were no services 25 miles circumference. It was difficult to get people services in the area. Many social workers were even scared to work in the area due to predominately African American residents. The closes Walmart was like 20 miles but 7/11 and liquor store

were places right in the neighborhoods (Personal Interview, June 24, 2016).

Another expressed

People that come to our attention are the ones having a difficult time managing the difficulties in their lives. And I hand you stuff to do to keep your kids and I make you do that in a place that is geographically hard to get to. We need to provide services in their homes (Personal Interview, June 24, 2016).

Two of the participants shared similar views in that they felt as though the services are provided to African American families, however, they chose not access them. This particular shared

The access to services are there but African American families don't believe in the services. The court mandates, in the child welfare system for families to attend certain programs such as drug court parenting or domestic violence. There are no difficulty accessing many just refuse to go and then they lose their children (Personal Interview, June 28, 2016).

### Summary

In summary, this chapter covered the demographics of the 11 participants and their perception of disproportionality of African American children in the child welfare from their own experiences of being social worker in the field. From the

face to face interviews themes were explored and identified based on Perceptions about disproportionality of African American children in the child-welfare system, why African American children are in the systems at high rates, effectiveness of evidence based program, needed services, policies or programs to address the concern, utilized trainings, race/ethnicity/culture into consideration at key decision points, difficulties African American Families have accessing support services.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter will present the themes observed and analyzed in chapter 4. Also, literature reviews that relates to the findings and recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research will be discussed. Although the participants of this study were all social workers they varied in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and years of experience in the child welfare agency. The results of this study identified African American children entering and staying in the system at longer rates, poverty, lack of resources in the community, distrust in the government and cultural competency as major contributing factors to disproportionality in the child welfare system. These finding are consistent with the literature and reoccurring themes addressed in the individual interviews.

#### Discussion

The study identified African American children entering and staying in the system at longer rates as one of the themes relating to this population being over represented in the child welfare system. This finding is consistent with existing literature (Andrade, Austin and Osterling, 2010; Derezotes, Poertner, and Testa, 2005; Hill,2006) that suggest evidence of African American children are referred,

investigated, substantiated, tend to have longer stay in out-of-home care, receive less comprehensive services, and are less likely to reunify than their Caucasian counterparts. Austin (2010) reported that referral rates for African American children were found to be investigated at higher than referrals for Caucasian children. In addition, Austin (2010) presented data collected from California Administration that represented different rates of placement into foster care amongst different ethnic groups of children. The out of home placement rates followed a particular order Native Americans (41.9%), African Americans (41.7%), White (32.9%), Hispanic/Latino (29.2%) and Asian Americans (25.0%).

Poverty has had a persistently strong relation to minority status in the United States. The study also found that the majority of the participants believed that poverty amongst the African American communities was one of the major challenges. This finding is consistent with Chibnall et al., (2003) study that suggested African-American families, were more likely to be poor in comparison to other non-minority groups which makes them more vulnerable to social problems, including child abuse and neglect, domestic violence and substance abuse, etc. African American children are more than three times as likely to live in poverty versus non-Hispanic White children and up to 14 times more likely to live in neighborhoods characterized by concentrated childhood poverty than are their White counterparts (Census Bureau, 2007; Fluke et al., 2010) Children of color have a greater representation of being in the child welfare system due to the many stressors and higher rates of maltreatment that generate from living in

poverty stricken environments along with dealing with oppressions in the community (Andrade, Austin and Osterling, 2010).

A study from 2014 U.S. Census Bureau showed that 27% of all African American men, women and children live below the poverty level in comparison to 11% of all Americans and 38% of African American children live in poverty in comparison to 22% of all children in America (Black demographic.com, 2017). In addition, it was noted that the highest poverty at 46% for African American families with children is contributed to single households headed my mothers. “A black child born today is less likely to be raised by both parents than a black child born during slavery. The recent disintegration of the African American family is due in large part to the mass imprisonment of black fathers” (Michelle Alexander 2010, p.1).

Results from the study found that the participants felt that lack of available resources in the African American communities as another theme surround the topic of disproportionality of this particular group. The majority of the participants shed light on that fact that many of the families on their caseload had trouble accessing services. Participants shared how many of the African American families live in isolated communities with no readily available mental health services, employment services, recovery programs, etc. in their communities. Many of the families lacked reliable transportations so reaching services creates a hardship. One of the participants shared how many families give up because geographically it's a challenge to reach services as well as manage the daily

struggles in their lives. Austin (2011) research found that millions of African Americans reside in communities that have little access to high paying jobs, good educational systems and are affected by high crime rates. Austin (2011) explained the epidemic as this group living in “separate and unequal communities” (p. 1).

Austin (2011) reported that millions of African Americans live in communities that lack access to good jobs and good schools and suffer from high crime rates. African Americans still reside mainly in separate and unequal communities. In 2010, in the 100 metropolitan areas with the largest African American populations, 62.5 percent of African Americans would have had to move to achieve full African American –Caucasian integration. African American families live in resource poor communities and often times geographically isolated from other communities that may provide needed services, programs and the support to meet their basic needs (Chibnall et al., 2003). Rivaux et al. (2008) suggested the study that unnecessary removing of a child from their home could potential be prevented if low-income families had access to available services at the same rate as those making higher incomes.

The participants in the study found distrust for the government agencies such as the child welfare system as another major theme. Participants shared that many of the African American families on their caseload expressed that they often times live in privacy and afraid to seek services out of fear of having their families divided or not being afforded equal services. It has been documented

throughout history that African American along with many other people of color have been discriminated against and received less than equal treatment. This finding is consistent with (Barrette and George 2005; Roberts, 2002) studies that it wasn't until the end of World War II that African Americans were virtually excluded from the child welfare system. Therefore, when this group received services they were limited to segregated institutions. In 1930, African American children were finally recognized by the child welfare system but still experienced discrimination when provided services.

Furthermore, Alexander (2011) discussed how at one point in time it was included into the Constitution that each African American slave was only to be considered as three-fifth of a human being. Slavery officially ended in 1865 which is approximately 152 years ago today. Just the simple fact that the government approved of such treatment of human beings and allowing them to be classified as slaves is enough to create a lifetime of distrust for every generation to come.

The final theme that was apparent during this study was the lack of cultural competency amongst group of social workers unfamiliar with the culture of African Americans. Many of the participants shared that they have worked with various colleagues that removed children from their homes due to their lack of understanding the cultural norms of African Americans. This finding is consistent with Hall and Lindsey's study findings (2016) that suggest that competency of social workers is limited when they do not possess tools of acknowledgment that can affect them when working with diverse populations. "Teaching students to be

mindful of and sensitive to issues, from potential language barriers to recognizing various religious sects, plays a role in effective practice” (Hall and Lindsey, 2016, p.1).

The findings of the study did support the research questions and the existing literature overall. Even if throughout the years with the topic of disproportionality as it relates to African American children in the child welfare system has been addressed from different angles, it is clear that there is still work that needs to be done. Even after gaining the perspectives from the social workers who have direct day to day contact with this group, further displays that there is a disconnect between the workers, the communities and the way in which agency services this population. On the other hand, the research over the years has shown improvements in the ways this issue has been addressed i.e. the Riverside County System Improvement Plan (SIP). However there is still a need to increase communication and create more of a partnership amongst the social workers, agencies and the African American communities. Everyone one involved has a common goal which is the safe well-being of the children so there is a need for a consensus.

### Limitations

The Limitations of my study surrounds the limited demographics. I had a sample size of 11 participants and only two of those participant were males. Having a larger sample size, with more representatives of each ethnic group and

even numbers of males and females would increase the veracity of the findings analyzed in the study. In addition, the questionnaire created was designed to ask face to face open ended questions, so many participants could have been uncomfortable providing honest responses.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

Gaining the perspectives from social workers was beneficial. However, the underlining result were consistent with researchers expressing that there are gaps not only in the literature but also in the reasoning behind this phenomena. This particular study articulated relevant needs that involve improvement in areas of social work practice. These needed improvement will increase the effectiveness in the programs and also in the way services are provided to African American children and their families. Before services, resources, programs, etc could be tailored to fit the dynamics of this population there is a critical need for the social work community to establish a trusting relationship with African American communities. With the history of discrimination and racism endured by this population there is very little open communication. It is important for the social works to step outside their own world views and truly comprehend what struggles each family has to overcome. There is a history of fear and vulnerability exhibited in the African American communities so resistance in the beginning is inevitable.

The findings show that participants have had experiences with their clients not having the ability to access services, resources and need programs. The

services are geographically in other communities in which many families do not have reliable transportation to seek out the services. Often time when families live in isolated poverty stricken communities, public transportation and child care is neither affordable nor reliable. Families having to go outside of their communities for provided services and typically can't survive the programs demands. Those families in term have a challenging time keep and getting their children out of the child welfare system.

This study displayed a need for social workers to take on more of a strength based approach and remembering to model the NASW code of ethics when working with African American families. Having the ability to meet the family where they are and understand that each family has their own set of unique values/ characteristics that defines them. Allow the families to be the experts and expressing how the social workers can be of assistance in the communities. In addition, it is important to create opportunities for the families to recognize their strengths, embrace self-empowerment and skill set they bring to their families/communities.

Furthermore, social workers researching and advocating for services to be implemented into the communities has the potential increase the families' well-being. The state providing free transportation and funding for child care to those mandated to attend program out of their area. Often time, families take longer to receive their children back due to the length of time the programs take to complete and their abilities to maintain daily life while meeting the programs

requirements. Social workers need to be aware of the community based services and have the ability to provide the families with what they need.

In addition, social workers could advocate for policies to change the amount of liquor stores that are built in the low income communities. In many poverty stricken communities there are liquor stores placed through the neighborhoods. Many children walk past more liquor stores going home from school than they do an outreach program. The liquor stores could be replaced with more outreach programs and mentoring programs to empower the children. The children being a part of programs designed to build personal character and abilities to see beyond their environments plants positive seeds of possibilities for success. An alarming rate of fathers are absent from African American homes so the mentoring program can eliminate barriers and provide opportunities to young African American boys.

The research showed the need for the agencies to change the way in which they train new social workers on cultural competency. Many of the social workers agreed that with everyone bringing in their identified and unidentified bias is a great way to begin dialogue amongst one another. Everyone brings their own experiences and knowledge to the table, so instead of watching videos, more face to face training should be implemented. Many expressed training not being mandatory and for the ones required to partake in training the information was retained at surface levels. Moreover, many of the social workers preferred training on cultural humility over cultural competency. Many prefer to actual sit

down with a family and have the ability to ask the right questions based off training surrounding how to approach the different cultures worked with. Often times, social worker approach a family with preconceived notions and learned assumptions versus viewing each family as a blank canvas they are open to explore. In addition, the social workers should take on the team approach when working with cultures they are unfamiliar with. Working as a team or having the ability to consult with a team member many prevent that particular social work from making a life changing decision such as removing a child from the home.

Lastly, African American families have to be willing to meet the social workers and other agencies members half way. The families have to be more receptive and open to working with the social works. Given the history, they have to make an assertive effort and not just assume the social workers are in place to take away their children. In addition, be cooperative and within the process, build relationship. African American families have to provide social workers the opportunity to be an access. Some of the African American families could start this partnership by slowly letting their guards down and welcoming the social workers into their lives. Social workers are ultimately in place to provide services and resources to families in effort to improve their quality of life.

## Recommendations for the Future Research

Further research is needed to explore options to have preventative services for African American families to be offered in their homes or alternatives to easy accessible service. Families shouldn't have to be inconvenienced or on the verge of losing employment due the programs not being readily available in the communities.

Further research needs to explore how to increase the relationships between the African American families and the social workers. Strategies, tools, techniques, etc, on how to openly communicate without implementing personal bias.

Further research needs to explore disproportionality of African American children from the perspective of adults that journeyed through the child welfare system. Their personal experience and what policies, practices or programs should be implemented to change the way in which this population is serviced need to be further examined.

## Conclusion

This study of explored social workers' perceptions of disproportionality of African American children in the child welfare system, with a particular focus how they feel child welfare agencies and organization address the specific needs of African American children and families. Along with the types of services social workers feel could be implemented in order to address the concern amongst

African American families. The social workers appeared to have given very candid responses during their interviews. The study recommends that the agencies, administrators, government officials, law makers, etc. to continue implementing new programs and creating more refined services that specifically cater to this population.

People's biases still strongly predict how they will respond in any given situation. Social workers and African American families have to make an assertive effort to see each others are partners and work together in ensuring the safety of the children is always the first priority. We live in a world where laws are broken, people discriminate and dishonest is relevant. It is up to great people like social workers who took on this career as a passion to improve lives no

APPENDIX A  
DEMOGRAPHICS AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Interview Guide

### **Demographics:**

1) Age:

2) Ethnicity origin (or Race): Please specify your ethnicity.

White

Hispanic or Latino

Black or African American

Native American or American Indian

Asian / Pacific Islander

Other

3) Education: highest degree or level of school you have completed?

Some high school, no diploma

High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)

Some college credit, no degree

Trade/technical/vocational training

Associate degree

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Professional degree

Doctorate degree

4) Years of experience in social work:

5) Job title:

6) Gender:

### **Interview Questions:**

7) Please tell me about your views on Disproportionality of African American children in the child welfare system? That is, whether it does exist or not..... Do you see the overrepresentation of African American children and families within your work place? Or in the past, if no longer with an agency?

8) Why do you think African American children are placed in the child welfare system at higher rates than Caucasian or children of other ethnicities?

9) How do evidence based programs such as Team Decision Making and Safe Care change the way in which your agency services African American children and their families? Or in your past experiences if no longer with a child welfare agency?

10) What types of services, policies or programs do you think are needed to address the disproportionality of African American children in the child welfare system?

11) Does your agency/ or did your past agency offer cultural competencies training or any type of training to assist you in working with African American children in the child welfare system?

12) Do you think social workers take race/ethnicity/culture into consideration at key decision points in African American children journey through the child welfare system? If yes, how so?

13) Please tell me about types of difficulties African American families have accessing support services?

Created by Researcher for the purpose of this project

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT

## INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to explore disproportionality of African American children in the child welfare system from the perceptions of social workers. The study is being conducted by Marquita Smith, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chang, Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institution Review Board Social Work Subcommittee at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to explore social workers perception of how child welfare agencies and organizations address the specific needs of African American children and families. Along with the type of services social workers feel could be implemented in order to address the concerns amongst African American families.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked to meet face to face in a comfortable setting for an interview which consists of questions regarding his/her perceptions on the type of policies, or programs that are already in place and what programs could be implemented to address the specific needs of African American children and families. Some demographics questions will also be asked.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your responses will remain confidential and all information disclosed is used solely for the purpose of this research. The audio recording will be destroyed 6 months after the student researcher graduates from the Master's Program.

**DURATION:** It will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete the face to face interview.

**RISK:** There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

**BENEFITS:** A 20.00 gift card to Starbucks will be given in efforts to display appreciation.

**AUDIO RECORDING:** I understand that this research will be audio recorded and notes would be taken in order to efficiently grasp my responses.

YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Janet Chang at (909)573-5184.

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library Scholar Works database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2017.

APPENDIX C  
IRB APPROVAL



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