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## The Examination of Confidentiality in A School Based Setting

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THE EXAMINATION OF CONFIDENTIALITY IN  
A SCHOOL BASED SETTING

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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  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Hannan Mukhles Dababneh  
Kalisha-Koran Ayisha Vault  
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June 2014

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## ABSTRACT

This research study explored the policies and procedures that education systems abide by, as well as how these policies are enforced to protect the confidentiality of dependent children's private information from being exposed in their schools to non-relatives and uninvolved parties to their case. Elementary, middle school, and high school faculty's perception of confidentiality was explored to identify individual competence when working with social workers during their direct contact visit with dependent children on school premises. Data collection included anonymous online surveys of 30-school faculty of various schools in the Southern California. There were no significant findings to support school faculty's lack of competence of confidentiality protocol when a Department of Children and Family Service social worker conducts a visit on school premises. Future research should involve a qualitative study of school faculty perceptions to gain more accurate and unbiased information from participants.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family; you all have nursed me with your affection and love and dedicated a big chunk of time, money, and patience in ensuring my success. No words can ever express how much you all mean to me. Thank you all for being so supportive in this process. – HD

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family who has supported me through the process of obtaining my master's degree. I appreciate their dedication, resilience and guidance; the completion of this thesis would not be possible without their involvement. – KV

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# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND

### Introduction

Social workers have a commitment to their clients and to their practice. The National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) preamble states that social workers must provide the best possible services to their clients, promote social justice, maintain and enforce the dignity and worth of the person, uphold the importance of human relationships, the integrity of the person, as well as remaining competent in their field of practice. In the specific field of Child Welfare, the social worker must provide services such as: supervision of children; provide resources to families; reduce the risk factors of children; provide protection from danger with the assistance of the law; as well as uphold the rights of the children and parents involved within the child welfare system.

According to Children and Family Services (CFS) (2012), Child Welfare Services (CWS) was established to protect maltreated children and promote the development of their physical and mental well-being. The department goals are as follows; enforce a child's right to safety, maintain permanency and strengthen family cohesion via strong community support systems. The purpose CWS is to assist in the prevention of child endangerment in all its forms, including intentional physical or psychological abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation, or neglect by any caregiver that is responsible for the health and

welfare of a child (Department of Children & Family Services, 2012). It is important to note the prevention of physical abuse encompasses much of the organization's efforts, securing the mental stability of the children served remains a paramount service objective.

Social worker's main duty when employed in the field of child welfare is to provide supervision of dependent children (foster children and children involved with child welfare) and their families. The supervision of these children must be direct contact at least once a month (Levinson, 2005). Frequently dependent children receive their direct contact supervision visit at their schools. Supervision of dependent children on school campuses are facilitated by the social worker and faculty within the school administration such as: clerical staff, attendance clerks, secretaries, teachers, and principals. Both the social worker and the school faculty are obligated to keep the dependent child's affiliation to CWS private. Many times this obligation of privacy can be misconstrued.

### Definitions

Merriam-Webster Online dictionary defines breach as "infraction or violation of a law, obligation, tie, or standard; a failure to do what is required by a law an agreement or a duty; failure to act in a required or promised way; a break in friendly relations between people or groups." Confidentiality had been defined by Merriam-Webster online dictionary as "showing that you are saying something that is secret or private; trusted with secret or private information;

entrusted with confidences; containing information whose unauthorized disclosure could be prejudicial to the national interest” (Merriam-Webster, 2013). According to the National association of Social Workers’ (NASW) social workers’ ethical responsibility to clients.

Social workers should protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service, except for compelling professional reasons. Only information that is directly relevant to the purpose for which the disclosure is made should be revealed. Social workers should not discuss confidential information in any setting unless privacy can be ensured. (NASW, 2008)

The Health Science Center IRB glossary defines Privacy as, “Control over the extent, timing and circumstances of sharing oneself (physically, behaviorally, or intellectually) with others” (as cited in OCR Information sheet, 2009).

For the purpose of this study confidentiality is defined as an individual’s or group’s ability to protect private and privileged documented information, specifically a child’s affiliation with Child Welfare Services (CWS), from being exposed to non-relatives and outside parties to the client’s case. Breaching confidentiality has been defined as an individual’s or group’s actions whether purposeful or accidental neglect to protect information resulting in the exposure of a client’s private and privileged information, specifically a child’s affiliation with Child Welfare Services (CWS), to non-relatives and outside

parties to the client's case. In this study privacy or private is defined as personal information that the child does not want other people to know and that may be stigmatized by their peers. Pertaining to this study, dependent children has been defined as any child that is under the supervision of Child Welfare Services living with their biological family or residing in a foster care placement; these children are dependents of the state.

### Statement of the Problem

The social work profession has different stipulations of confidentiality than elementary, middle school, and high school education systems. What social workers think breaching confidentiality is may not be so for the education systems. For example, when a social worker visits a school and requests a student, the administration is supposed to keep that child's identity from being exposed to school faculty and other students. In many instances, people in the offices overhear the school faculty respond with the dependent child's name or may ask another student to retrieve the dependent child to meet with their social work. Because the school has an obligation to keep school records confidential, they may fail to realize the obligation of the social worker to keep the dependent child's affiliation with CWS confidential. As a result, social workers and school faculty can breach confidentiality unintentionally.

Confidentiality is one of the most common ethical dilemmas within organizations that have a client, patient, or consumer base. There are a

number of professions in which confidentiality regulations are used with clients, patients, and consumers. Maintaining the privacy of clients is necessary in the psychological, social service, medical, education system, and legal fields just to name a few. Confidentiality has been further enforced over the years due to the detrimental legal consequences of breaching confidentiality.

Breaching confidentiality continues to be a problem due to the various definitions of confidentiality within individual fields or organization. Because all fields of practice do not have one general policy regarding confidentiality, the collaboration of fields jeopardizes the obligation of confidentiality to clients; as one field may not be knowledgeable of the other's confidentiality procedures. There are various scenarios in which the privacy of clients are upheld and circumstances where the risk of breaching confidentiality is increased.

It is important for this subject of social workers and school faculty who hold an obligatory duty to protect the privacy of clients to be explored. This exploration is essential due to the effects of breaching confidentiality and its negative impact on clients' and consumers' emotional, mental, and physical well-being. In addition, breaching confidentiality can strain the relationship between families and the education systems; damage the rapport between social workers and their clients; social workers can potentially fail to uphold the NASW Code of Ethics; school faculty can potentially breach the Family

Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA); as well increase the liability for the school districts.

### Purpose of the Study

This study has explored the policies and procedures that education systems abide by, as well as how these policies are enforced to protect the confidentiality of dependent children's private information from being exposed in their schools to non-relatives and uninvolved parties to their case.

Elementary, middle school, and high school faculty's perception of confidentiality was explored to identify individual competence when working with social workers during their direct contact with dependent children on school premises. The aspects of transfer of information from the social worker to faculty within the school were examined as well as information passed from personnel to personnel via verbal means of contact.

To accurately study the action of breaching of confidentiality in schools, the researchers found it best practice to utilize an anonymous online survey. The survey was distributed through an online survey site called Qualtrics. This site gave the researchers the capability to distribute to individuals via a link that was emailed to them by principles, coworkers, and other participants in the study. In theory, this type of survey would encourage participants to give more honest answers by having the security of knowing their identities would never be revealed.

Social workers and school faculty have different perceptions of confidentiality and may not be aware of the confidentiality protocols of one another. Due to the different definitions of confidentiality between the education and social service systems the following question was explored: Are existing school policy and procedures regarding confidentiality sufficient when working with a foster child or child that is involved in the child welfare system?

### Significance of the Project for Social Work

This research study is significant to the field of social work because it has the potential to explore the confidentiality efforts of school faculty. The study can identify the strengths and weaknesses of the confidentiality protocols of the education systems. The results of the study can help implement interventions that are necessary to strengthen the confidentiality and privacy practices in schools. As a result, strengthening these procedures and protocols will in turn strengthen the confidentiality efforts of social workers making their monthly face-to-face visits at schools less of a risk in breaching the child's rights to confidentiality.

### Generalist Intervention Process

The engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation and termination phases of the Generalist Intervention process were informed by this study. The researchers engaged the school officials and participants via email and telephone by informing them of the purpose of the study to gain

their participation. The current protocols and procedure in the school systems were assessed to be knowledgeable of the issue of confidentiality. The study methods and disbursement of the study was planned to develop a thorough study with desired results. The researchers implemented the plan by disbursing the survey. Once the results were received the results of the study were evaluated to develop the findings. The termination of this study ended with the completion of the survey and the summary of the findings in the discussion.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the differences between privacy and confidentiality; the pertinent literature discussing confidentiality laws in various fields include schools and students' rights, foster children's rights, policies and practices within the school systems regarding children involved with CWS, the stigma of dependent and foster children and the effects of stigma, and social workers in the school settings. This section also addresses the lack of literature examining the importance of confidentiality with foster children, and the effects of breaches of confidentiality in school settings.

#### Privacy and Confidentiality

According to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), federal laws view privacy and confidentiality differently (OCR, 2009). Privacy addresses a person's ability to determine to what degree, when and under which circumstances a individual shares information about themselves with other people.

Confidentiality pertains to information about a person that has been shared in a context of trust, that is the person believes the information will not be given to other people without their permission (OCR, 2009).

In terms of children within the child welfare and educational systems, privacy and confidentiality also must be differentiated. In regards to protecting

the privacy of a child's identity as a person within the child welfare system, schools and social workers should not identify the child as someone involved with the child welfare system except to other professionals who have a need to know. Based on the definition provided by the OCR, it is up to the child's discretion whether they want to share their identity as a dependent child with other people. It is also up to their own discretion to decide when that information is shared and how much they want to share about being a dependent child. If a school employee insists that a social worker or child explain why the social worker is there to see the child or they insist the child tell them about what the child discussed with the social worker, the child's privacy will be breached.

Confidentiality speaks to the information or data about a person. Any information regarding the status of the student's child welfare case, their reunification plan, or issues with the birth parents must be protected because this is an issue of confidentiality. Therefore, if a school employee discusses information about any of the above mentioned topics to someone who does not have a need to know, they have breached that student's confidentiality. Both issues of privacy and confidentiality are of great importance when working with children in the child welfare system. It is mandatory school staff and social workers alike to be mindful of their surroundings and people present when discussing a dependent child in the school setting because they may inadvertently breach the student's privacy and confidentiality.

## Confidentiality in the Medical Field

Confidentiality in the medical field consists of an agreement between a person seeking health care services and a professional providing those services. Any medical information that is touched upon during the appointment will not be made available without the agreement of the patient (Weisler, 2003). The intent of the confidentiality agreement is to provide a space in which the patient feels comfortable to share important information with the health care provider and to engender trust in the patient towards the medical field as well as the provider. When treating minors, if a child has not yet reached adolescence, it is understandable that any examinations or treatment decisions will be made by the parent because the child is not yet developmentally capable of making informed medical decisions for himself or herself. Weisler (2003) discusses the debate as to whether adolescents are developmentally capable of making informed decisions about their medical care even when provided with informed consent during which the adolescent is told about the various pros and cons about treatment and treatment alternatives (Boonstra & Nash, 2000). According to Weisler (2003), confidentiality is especially important in adolescent medicine and should be seen as a guiding principle. It should be noted, the guarantee of confidentiality is not absolute. A patient's, whether a minor or adult, confidentiality can be broken for many of the same reasons as in the field of social services; such as in the case of abuse, injuries inflicted by a gun, if a patient is a danger to

himself or others, or when the life and health of the patient are at serious risk (English, 1990). In fact, to maintain confidentiality under any of these circumstances would be in violation of the law as well as in violation of professional standards (Ford & Millstein, 1997).

Despite the understanding of doctor-patient confidentiality, studies have demonstrated that a minority (21%) of doctors in various specializations are willing to talk with their adolescent patients about confidentiality while some medical professionals do not agree as to whether adolescents have a legal right to confidentiality due to their minor status (Resnick, Litman, & Blum, 1992). In the *Journal of Child Neurology*, Weisler (2003) discusses the possible lack of knowledge that neurologists have regarding their adolescent patients' right to confidentiality.

Weisler (2003) thought it likely that neurologists were not aware of an adolescent's right to confidentiality or might even disagree with an adolescents' right to confidentiality because it was likely that neurologists did not treat many adolescents on a regular basis. Weisler (2003) fails to make a definitive statement regarding neurologists' knowledge or acceptance of adolescents' rights to privacy, instead citing the Society of Adolescent Medicine's recommendations that doctors who may or may not regularly treat adolescents support confidentiality when working with adolescents', and in the case where confidentiality cannot be maintained, develop a plan based on the recommendations of their specific medical society.

This lack of a consensus lends itself to the inconsistent treatment of adolescents in the medical field. According to Weisler (2003), the way a physician construes the meaning of the law is subjective; thus, there is no concrete principle. Physicians should continue to educate themselves on the statutes pertaining to confidentiality as they change over time (Weisler, 2003).

### Confidentiality in the Legal Field

Many people are familiar with the concept of attorney-client privilege; it is well known in social discourse that what is shared with an attorney stays with the attorney. Rule 3-100 of the California Rules of Professional Conduct (2013) outlines the rules of confidentiality between an attorney and a client. Although an attorney can reveal confidential information it is recommended that the attorney protect the confidential relationship with the client in order to establish trust, which is seen as the foundation of the relationship (California Rules of Professional Conduct, 2013).

According to The California Rules of Professional Conduct (2013) when a client trusts their attorney to maintain confidentiality, they are more likely to reveal all of the information necessary for the attorney to do his or her job. If an attorney thinks they may need to reveal privileged information they must obtain informed consent (California Rules of Professional Conduct, 2013). The exceptions to confidentiality in the legal field are similar to those in the social services field; an attorney can decide to break confidentiality if the information will prevent someone from being hurt, prevent a client from hurting himself or

herself, or to prevent a crime (Rothstien, 2007). An attorney is not required to disclose these exceptions to confidentiality to his or her client, and the decision to break confidentiality is at the discretion of the attorney; there is no legal statute, which outlines when and if confidentiality can be breached.

There have been several studies, which surveyed attorneys to determine how many told their clients about confidentiality and exceptions to confidentiality (Klinka & Pearce, 2011). In each study it was determined that over 90% of attorneys discussed a client's right to confidentiality, but that less than 70% of attorneys discussed the exceptions to confidentiality. According to Klinka and Pearce (2011) this leaves clients unaware of the fact that the information they reveal to their attorney may be disclosed at the attorney's discretion. According to these researchers this is due to attorneys incorrectly believing that if their clients were aware of confidentiality exceptions they would withhold information important to their case or defense. Klinka and Pearce (2011) make several recommendations about how attorneys can approach this delicate topic with clients stating that it is important that clients are treated with dignity and afforded the opportunity to decide what is important to tell their attorneys, rather than have the attorney decide for them. The authors suggest that attorneys inform clients about exceptions to confidentiality by first explaining that the attorney is there to protect their information and represent them, but that in some cases, such as lying on the stand (perjury), they are obligated to report that information. If a client

understands all of the circumstances under which an attorney can breach confidentiality, they are more likely to be honest and forthright with their attorney (Klinka & Pearce, 2011).

Collaborative law, which is practiced in family law, requires attorneys to work closely with mental health professionals. Mental health professionals are often used as mediators in family court to help couples who are filing for divorce come to an amenable arrangement. An article written by Conti (2011) states that attorneys find themselves working closely with mental health professionals now more than in the past and that there can be conflict between an attorney maintaining client privilege and a mental health practitioner's obligation to report child abuse.

According to Conti (2011) the attorneys and family court mediators form an interdisciplinary team, but because of the mental health professional's status as a mandated reporter many attorneys do not consider the mediator as a part of the team. An attorney might avoid asking their client questions that would reveal information that must be reported. This conflict of duties creates an ethical dilemma both for the attorney and the mediator as the laws and professional principles that guide both of them are in conflict (Conti, 2011). Conti (2011) makes the argument that laws concerning child abuse and neglect need to be changed to offer an exception when attorneys and mental health professionals work as interdisciplinary team members. Currently, many states do not require attorneys to report child abuse when it is disclosed to

them because there seems to be an emphasis on preserving privilege in the interest of justice and fairness (Conti, 2011). If child abuse has been reported to an attorney, the attorney can decide to report or not report depending on the level of danger to the child. If the child is in immediate danger, then the attorney can break the attorney-client privilege to protect the child. However, if the child is not in immediate danger, the attorney does not have to report the abuse but this can impede the client from getting help that may be necessary (California Rules of Professional Conduct, 2013; Conti, 2011).

There are several ways to tackle the inconsistency of reporting requirements between attorneys and mental health professionals. The first would be to create an amendment to current child abuse reporting laws (Conti, 2011). There are other circumstances in which mental health workers are exempt from reporting laws such as when working with victims of sexual assault. Mental health professionals who work with this population are not mandated reporters because of the likelihood that a victim of sexual assault would not seek help if they thought that they would be reported for a crime when disclosing the details of their assault. Therefore, the exception to the reporting law in the context of a multidisciplinary legal team would not set a precedent for this exception (Conti, 2011).

Additional alternatives to tackle the inconsistency in reporting laws would be to create what Conti (2011) calls a confidentiality wall. This would prohibit a professional who is part of a multidisciplinary legal team from being

provided with any information that might result in a report from a mandated reporter. Conti (2011) acknowledges that in both cases, exception or confidentiality wall, carry the potential for serious problems including incidents of child abuse going unreported or mediators not being provided with important information that could help benefit their clients. The difficulties created by multidisciplinary team members' differing definitions of confidentiality are not easily remedied and require more research and consideration before effective changes can be made. The difficulties for multidisciplinary teams become even more complex when a minor within the child welfare and school systems is part of the issue at hand, as confidentiality is addressed differently within the education system.

### Confidentiality in Education

There are four main laws that tackle the issue of student confidentiality in schools, and govern the use and sharing of information (Sealander, 1999) they are the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 1974); The Grassley Amendment to the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994; Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act (1997); and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997).

The first law, FERPA (1974) has four components including parental and student access to records, receiving parental consent to enroll a child in a program that could change a child's values or behavior, conditions for federal funding, and protection of children who are part of federally funded surveys

(FERPA, 1974). The second law, The Grassley Amendment (1994), which amends the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, addresses confidentiality of students who take part in surveys and evaluations. Under the Grassley Amendment (1994) any student's participation in any evaluation of a qualifying educational program that is federally funded, remains confidential. Under the third law, the Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act (1976), students' participation in drug and alcohol treatment remains confidential. Record of their participation in drug and alcohol treatment programs remains separate from their school record, and is stored under lock and key (Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act, 1976). Students who participate in special education are covered under the three laws mentioned above but are also protected under the fourth law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997). This law protects the confidentiality of a student's status as a special education student (IDEA, 1997) (Sealand, 1999).

### Confidentiality in Social Work

It is widely known that information in the social services is confidential. Social workers adhere to professional and ethical standards in order to provide the highest level of service (NASW, 1999). Due to the generalist and person-in-environment perspectives, it can sometimes be difficult to determine exactly who a client is and where the boundaries of confidentiality begin and end because multiple parties can be perceived as clients. Confidentiality is both a legal issue and an ethical issue in social work. The NASW published a

position statement in 1991 in which they discussed the ethical and legal obligations of school social workers, and confidentiality (NASW, 1991). The NASW position statement states, clients have a legal right to privileged communication and that under the laws established for privileged communication social workers can adhere to their professional obligation to maintain confidentiality (NASW, 1991). Social workers are unable to divulge privileged information in specific situations such as the client being a danger to himself or others, when a client has threatened the life of a person during a therapeutic session (Tarasoff), when there is child abuse, or when a client has signed an informed consent giving the social worker permission to divulge privileged information to specifically named parties.

Social workers who work in a school environment also have an obligation to protect the confidentiality of their clients. This can be problematic because many people in the school environment have a right to know specific information about a student such as parents and school administrators. According to the NASW position statement (1991), a school social worker has multiple clients including the student, the parents, school administrators, and the community at large. This can make it difficult for the school social worker to correctly maintain confidentiality if he or she has so many clients to serve. In an editorial written by Kopels (1992), the author states that despite the assertion that a school social worker has multiple clients, the only client a school social worker has is the student. If that is the case, then the issue of

confidentiality is simple; the privilege of confidentiality belongs to the student and no one else (Kopels, 1992). Koples (1992) goes on to say that a school social worker may be asked by many people in the school for information about a child, such as a teacher asking about a child's behaviors or community agencies desire to have more information about the home life of a child. A social worker may not divulge that information without the consent of the student. This can make certain relationships between the social worker and staff difficult because there may be an expectation that the social worker will reveal the information (Kopels, 1992). Additionally, school policies about confidentiality are different than social work policies regarding confidentiality. These different definitions of the same word can inadvertently cause a staff member to reveal information about a student to an inappropriate person that a social worker would have kept confidential (Kopel, 1992).

A study conducted by Rae, Sullivan, and Razo (2009) surveyed school psychologists who work with adolescents to determine their perception of when it is ethical to break confidentiality and when it is not. Although this study examined school psychologists as opposed to social workers, the study is relevant in that school psychologists are bound by the same confidentiality guidelines as social workers. The authors noted that psychologists working with adolescents face a greater dilemma in maintaining confidentiality because adolescents regularly participate in high-risk behavior as part of their stage of development (Rae et al., 2009). The authors were able to successfully survey

78 school psychologists who were members of the National Association of School Psychologists, and either had a master's degree, special certification, or a doctorate. The survey was divided into two sections, one that rated participants' perceptions as to when it was ethical to break confidentiality based on a vignette included in the survey. In the second part of the survey, the participants provided information about their age, gender, years of experience, and work setting (Rae et al., 2009).

Rae et al. (2009) determined that when the students in the vignette engaged in behavior that was more dangerous or could be harmful the psychologists found more ethical the breach confidentiality. Frequency or duration of behaviors was not as significant a factor in breaking confidentiality as the level of risk (Rae et al., 2009). The findings of Rae et al. (2009) would most likely be similar if the survey had been administered to social workers because the ethical principles that guide confidentiality for social workers are similar to those of psychologists. In social work, the protection of the client's dignity and right to privacy is of the utmost priority. The school environment can make protecting the client difficult and troubling and it would not be surprising to find that school social workers face ethical dilemmas related to breach of confidentiality on a regular basis. Thus, the present is expected to yield similar results as Rae et al. (2009). Due to the nature of the present study, one can say the present study differs from previous studies in that it focuses on the topic of confidentiality and privacy within the school system

regarding a specific population (children in the welfare system); specifically this present study examines the perception of school faculty perceptions of confidentiality in relation to dependent children in the child welfare system. The present study is similar to previous studies (studies such as Rae et al. (2009) in that perception of confidentiality and/or privacy are being examined.

### Rights of Dependent Children

The four educational laws previously mentioned in the confidentiality in education section are the guiding principles under which schools operate, and help shape their policies and procedures regarding confidentiality, but these laws are limited in that they only address confidentiality of records and protection of students who are part of federal surveys (Sealand, 1999). Although there are guidelines which speak to students who are in the child welfare system (San Bernardino County Department of Child and Family Services, 2013) and laws in place regarding mandated reporting (McCarthy & Sorenson, 1993), there are few guidelines found in the literature which speak to the protection of confidentiality of dependent children in the school system beyond the laws that their identity as children involved with child welfare be confidential.

Even within the California State Rights for Foster Youth, there is no guarantee of confidentiality (Ladew, 2007). Within the school system, a foster child only has the right to go to school every day, and to partake in after-school activities (Ladew, 2007). However, when a child becomes a

dependent of the court, their status as a foster child is mandated by federal and state laws (County of San Bernardino Department of Child and Family Services, 2013). This lack of a stated right in schools to confidentiality creates an area of confusion in helping schools to create procedures which would protect the identity of children involved with child welfare from other students or staff who do not have the “right to know” the child’s status as a dependent of the court.

#### Policies and Practices for Dependent Children in Schools

Policies and procedures are important guidelines for any organization. They outline the expectations and processes that must be adhered to for everyone to successfully fulfill their job requirements and for the organization to be successful. Often in child welfare, social work practitioners are asked for information about clients that could infringe on a person’s right to privacy. The Department of Children and Family Services, which oversees the care and wellbeing of children in foster care, has written policies and procedures regarding confidentiality. In the Confidentiality Policies and Procedures from the San Bernardino County department of Children and Family Services (2013) it states that federal, state, and county laws guide their confidentiality policy. The Confidentiality Policies and Procedures (2013), also state that effective social work includes ensuring a person’s privacy.

The Confidentiality Policies and Procedures (2013) help social workers understand how to respond to information from sources that do not have a right to personally identifiable information (PII), and how to ensure confidentiality in the age of electronic information sharing. According to the Confidentiality Policies and Procedures (2013) losing the trust of a client can hinder communication with clients that can hinder a social worker's ability to create change and understand their clients' needs. This is why confidentiality is so important to the practice of social work. The trust of the client toward their social workers ensures that a good relationship is developed. If a client suspects or knows that a social worker has breached confidentiality, the relationship could be negatively impacted and the client will fail to receive help.

#### Stigma, Dependent Children, and Its Effects

According to Osgood, Foster, and Courtney (2010), foster youths are a vulnerable population who must overcome many challenges in many settings, including a school-based setting. Foster youths in schools are considered a vulnerable population because of the stigma associated with being in foster care. Understanding the effects of stigma is important because the consequences of a stigmatized identity can lead to many problems including physical health, emotional, health, and overall success.

Vogel, Bitman, Hammer, and Wade (2013) examined two different kinds of stigma: public stigma and self-stigma. The researchers examined the theory that public stigma will create self-stigma. According to the researchers

public stigma is defined as a stigmatizing opinion that is common among the general public. Self-stigma is the degradation of a person's self-esteem because a person thinks that they are not socially acceptable (Vogel et al., 2013). It is likely that someone who has a high level of self-stigma will be less likely to seek services when they need help. This can be problematic as those who have a stigmatized identity have higher rates of depression and anxiety (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009) and are less likely to seek mental health services because of the stigma associated with mental health issues (Vogel et al., 2013).

Based on the literature it is reasonable to assume that stigma affects foster and other dependent children in schools in two ways: stigma associated with being a dependent child of the state, and stigma for having mental health or behavioral disorders. According to Pecora et al. (2009), due to the traumatic nature of their family histories, most dependent children are at a higher risk for mental health and behavior disorders than children not in foster care. Foster youths carry a heavy burden with the stigma of being a foster child and suffering from mental health issues or behaviors. Preserving confidentiality is of the utmost importance in maintaining the trust of these clients and in shielding them from additional judgment, stereotypes, and inequitable treatment.

## Theories and Guiding Conceptualization

None of the aforementioned literature cited any theoretical bases for the creation of their study; however, based on the topic it can be easy to assume that these studies were created based on the notion of stigma. That is breaches in confidentiality or privacy may result in an individual becoming stigmatized. According to Goffman (1963), stigma is “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” and suggests the individual being stigmatized goes from being “normal” to tainted (p. 3). Thus, this stigma creates a “mark” and this “mark” devalues the individual, making them social undesirable. Stigma can be over (avoidance etc) or subtle (non-verbal expression such as not making eye contact); thus being “marked” as social undesirable based on a breach of confidentiality or privacy may lead to psychological distress or self-fulfilling prophecies such as being a troublemaker. The present research was devised based on the effects of stigma created through the breach of confidentiality or privacy.

This study was conceptualized with the help of Goffman’s definition of stigma and labeling theory. Labeling theory postulates that, “the idea that behaviors are deviant are only when society labels them as deviant” (Crossman, 2014). Thus, Goffman’s definition of stigma regarding being “marked” can be in conjunction with labeling theory which helps explain the effects of breaches in privacy/confidentiality. They help explain the effects of these breaches in that society is the one that labels what is deviant and not,

and this label is stigmatizing because it results in the individual being avoided by those in society. In the end, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because after a while those stigmatized or labeled as “deviant” start to believe they are different from society and therefore are unwanted, and start to commit deviant acts and criminal behavior such as stealing, assaulting others, gang involvement and so forth. Therefore the school faculty and the social worker must take great measures to keeping the child’s information confidential.

### Summary

A thorough review of the research demonstrates that the differing statutes and concentrations surrounding confidentiality in various fields can often cause conflict in regards to how to honor a person’s right to privacy. Policies and procedures can provide a guideline, but only within a person’s established field and does not necessarily cover confidentiality when working in a multidisciplinary capacity with team members who are not part of the social services field. Dependent children carry a stigmatized identity both in terms of public stigma and self-stigma due to their status as a foster child and due to the mental health and behavioral issues which are part of many dependent children’s lives. It is important in terms of good social work practice and for the sake of social work clients that those who are aware of their involvement with child welfare guard their confidentiality. It is valuable to examine school faculty perceptions of confidentiality in the hope that it may

help to improve confidentiality in schools when working with children involved with CWS.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

The current study examines school faculty's perceptions of confidentiality in relation to dependent children in the child welfare system. This section describes the study's design, sampling criteria, data collection, procedures, and instruments used to analyze the results. This section also discusses the preservation of the participants' anonymity and describes the methods used to analyze the data.

#### Design

The purpose of this exploratory quantitative study was to evaluate school faculty perceptions of policies and procedures as well as typical school protocol in protecting the confidential status of dependent children in school settings. The rationale behind the utilization of an exploratory quantitative method was due to the utilization of secondary research (information regarding perception from school faculty), and because there is not a study such as this one in existence. Due to the different conceptualizations of confidentiality between the education and social service systems the researchers expect that school faculty will perceive maintaining confidentiality differently than social workers would in the school setting. It is also expected that school faculty will generally agree with actions that would be considered a violation of

confidentiality from a social services perspective due to the different definitions of confidentiality between education social service systems. Due to the different definitions of confidentiality between the education and social service systems the following research question was explored: Are existing school policy and procedures regarding confidentiality sufficient when working with a foster child or child that is involved in the child welfare system?

School faculty perceptions were evaluated through a scale that was created by the researchers. Participants answered the questions based on the vignettes using a five point Likert scale to select their level of agreement with the questions. Univariate statistics were used to analyze the responses and determine the frequencies and percentages of respondents' agreement. There were several limitations in using this type of research method. For one participants may not have answered honestly due to the social desirability factor, in which people answer in a way that is perceived to be more positive but does not necessarily represent what they would normally do. This may be due to a concern that the participants will be perceived as unqualified for their positions, or possessing a lack of education. Another limitation with this study was in regards to the sample itself. The sample was a snowball method of sampling of school faculty at multiple school sites from multiple school districts in the Inland Empire. A snowball sampling method is a method in which participants recruit future participants from individuals they know. Using a snowball sample can limit the generalizability of the findings because they may

be limited to the particular group that was sampled. That is, individuals are more likely to associate with those similar to them. For example, females are more likely to associate with females; thus, the majority of females in the present may be attributed to the fact female participants did most of the recruiting. The diversity of the sample were also limited in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status as well as varied levels of experience in working with dependent children.

### Sampling

The sample was comprised of school faculty who work at multiple school sites in multiple school districts in the Inland Empire area of California. For the first set of sample participants the researchers obtained the names and contact information of the principals for each school from their respective school websites. The researchers then contacted the principals at each school via email with an explanation of the study (See Appendix A), and were able to obtain their permission to conduct the study at the selected schools. The researchers then contacted the school principals via telephone to follow up and answer any questions the principal's had.

Once permission was obtained from the principals via email or by means of a letter with the schools letterhead, and IRB approval was granted, the researchers then provided the principals with a link to the online survey (See Appendix D) that they distributed to school faculty. The sample size was rather modest with 30 participants, 23 females and 7 males. The majority of

the participants were Caucasians, females, had a graduate or professional degree, and been in their current position from less than a year to 5 years; see Table 1 for descriptive. The sample was chosen due to budgetary and time constraints; however, due to an abysmally low number of participants at the start of the study, a snowball method was employed due to the knowledge that the participants had an increased likelihood of knowing other school faculty who would be willing to take the survey.

Participants accessed the link, at their convenience using their computers from home, phone, or work computer. Participants were asked to complete the survey no later than February 24, 2014. In addition, the researchers were unable to obtain a large enough sample size through means of approval via-principals, thus the researchers began snowball sampling via confidential contacts within two school districts and obtained more participants.

### Data Collection and Instruments

The principals were contacted by email (Appendix A), explaining the purpose and the nature of the study. The researchers then emailed a link to the school faculty inviting them to participate in the study and were directed to a website which briefly explained the purpose of the study, the steps taken to preserve their confidentiality, and the questions they would answer.

Participants were then directed to a page requesting their consent (Appendix

B), which was indicated by checking a box on the web page and providing the date.

By checking the box and providing the date the researchers were notified that the participants were aware of the purpose and nature of the study, that they are over 18 years of age, and that they freely consent as participants of the study. After providing their consent, the participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) indicating their age, number of years in their position, education level, gender, and ethnicity.

Once participants completed the demographic questionnaire, participants were provided with four vignettes (See Appendix D) which described a specific situation that included an interaction with a social worker and/or student who is a court dependent, and a person who does have a need to know the student's status as a dependent child. Once participants had finished reading the vignette, they then were asked to answer a series of questions related to the vignette and provide their level of agreement to the questions. At the conclusion of the questionnaire, participants were provided with a debriefing statement (See Appendix E), which described the purpose of the study. This study was designed so to examine the participants' understanding of policies, procedures, and practices surrounding confidentiality of students who are dependents of the child welfare system. The levels of measurement for the scale were ordinal. There were no

dependent or independent variables, as these variables were not identified in the research.

To evaluate the practices of school faculty when interacting with a social worker and/or dependent student, the researchers constructed an instrument. The instrument was created through the use of Subject Matter Experts (SME's), who are social workers who have had experiences with visiting dependent children in schools. Validity was not measured for this instrument due to time constraints, but the researchers are very confident that the instrument is valid due to the utilization of SMEs. As for testing for reliability, the instrument was not tested for reliability due to time constraints; however, based on the fact SMEs helped create the instrument it is assumed reliability has been met. The strengths of this instrument is the fact SMEs were utilized in the creation of the instrument, and the weakness was the inability to test for interrater reliability through gathering a new set of SMEs to discuss if the items in the survey are correct. In regards to cultural sensitivity, this survey was not culturally insensitive. Although cultural sensitivity was not taken into account during the survey construction, it did not violate any cultural standards. The vignettes were created by asking child welfare social workers and child welfare supervisors about common experiences when visiting children in the child welfare system at schools as well as from one of the researcher's personal experiences visiting child welfare clients at school. The

vignettes were created with the utilization of SMEs describing their experiences visiting dependent children in school.

The following are some of the questions that were asked: “I would have the DCFS worker sign-in on the visitor’s log.” “There should be a separate sign-in sheet for DCFS workers.” “I should never take a photo copy of the DCFS workers badge during their visit.” “I should verbally confirm the name of the student to the DCFS worker.” “I should contact the student’s teacher and inform them that the student’s DCFS worker is here to see them.” The scale used was a five point Likert scale with “1” being associated with “Highly Disagree” and “5” being associated with “Highly Agree”.

### Procedures

Permission to survey the participants was obtained from the school principals of the following schools, Crafton Elementary, principal Patricia Buchmiller, Kimberley Elementary, principal Matthew Osmond, & San Andreas High School, principal Jim Dilday. All of these schools are located in the Inland Empire and have provided the researchers with a letter stating that participation via school faculty has been approved, and was sent on school letterhead. Once permission was obtained to conduct the study, school principals were provided a link that they then provided to their school faculty via email inviting the school faculty to participate in the study. The sample was drawn from various front-end office school faculty from the multiple school sites. The data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire.

Due to an insufficient sample size, the researchers used snowball sampling through contacts in two school districts. The contacts, who wished to remain anonymous, contacted other school faculty via telephone or email at various school sites and provided staff members with the link to the online survey. Once the participants received the link to the survey, (Qualtrics), a free survey construction and data collection website), they were then directed to a page which explained the purpose and the requirements to participate in the study and required their consent to participate, which was indicated by checking a box on the web page and providing the date.

By checking the box and providing the date the researchers were then notified that the participants were aware of the purpose and nature of the study and that they freely consented as participants of the study. Participants were randomly assigned a number, which was not connected to their identity; no self-identifying information was requested, thus ensuring the confidentiality of their identities and participation.

This process took a total of 3 months (from December 2013 - March 2014) to complete from beginning to end. It took roughly 2 months (from late December 2013 till the first week of February 2014) to gain IRB approval. Once IRB was gained, we then were given the responsibility to produce school letters as proof that our surveys would be administered to those school faculty. That process took less than a week (from the first week of February to the middle of the second week in February). We were able to gain three school

letterheads that gave their approval to allow school faculty to take the survey. However, once we administered the surveys we found that we needed more participants and therefore IRB needed to be modified in order to allow snowball sampling as well as to allow all school faculty to take the survey. It took roughly 8 days during the month of February to gain IRB approval for the utilization of snowball sampling, due to low sample size. It took less than a month (during the month of March) to gain the current sample of participants, finish the application of the survey, and to collect all the necessary sampling.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

The information that was provided by the participants has been kept strictly confidential, and the participants were informed of their confidential participation. No names or identifying information was collected or published.

An informed consent statement was provided on the website prior to the participants completing the questionnaire. The informed consent statement included the nature of the study, and the approximation of the time it would take to complete the survey. The statement also included an explanation of the protection of their confidentiality throughout the study.

No identifying information was requested in the survey, participants were just required to check a box as form of consent. The responses on qualtrics are password protected, that is a person requires the username and password of the researchers to access the responses. After the responses were downloaded, they were placed in a password protected computer, and

the dataset was examined to make sure no identifying information was in the dataset; if there was it was deleted by the researchers. Since respondents were only allowed to check boxes, there was no identifiable information. Also, Qualtrics does not record respondents' Internet protocol addresses.

Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and that they are free to not answer any question or withdraw their participation at any time. The phone number to the thesis adviser was provided as well as options for counseling should answering the questions upset any participant. It was not anticipated that there would be distress due to their participation because none of the questions were likely to evoke a negative response. See Appendix (B) for the informed consent.

### Data Analysis

This exploratory study used a quantitative approach in analyzing the data. An online survey (See Appendix D) was made available to the participants through a link to a website which was provided to them. The data was evaluated using univariate statistics to see the percentage of participants who agree regarding specific procedures when working with a Department of Children and Family Services social worker. In the demographic questionnaire (Appendix C), the majority of the questions were nominal measures (e.g. gender and ethnicity), and the rest of the items were either ratio (age) or ordinal (education level). As for the questions asked after reading the vignettes, those items were ordinal as well.

The survey was created for this specific study by the researchers. The survey did not test for validity or reliability due to the researchers time constraints. Participants' responses were quantified using descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequencies. Based on the percentages and frequencies of the responses, the researchers were able to determine if there was agreement among school faculty regarding maintaining students' confidentiality in the data. Due to the fact that there is a lack of literature regarding this topic, the strength of an exploratory study is that it was able to examine school faculty perceptions which can be qualitatively tested in future research studies to help create effective guidelines regarding confidentiality and dependent children; as well as help shape these future studies questions and examination of the topic. Trends in the participants' responses were analyzed to determine if there are adequate safeguards in existing school procedures and practices to protect the confidential status of a child welfare minor client.

### Summary

The contents of this chapter provide an overview of the specific research procedures involved in carrying out this study. Explanations about the design, sampling, procedures, and data analysis are given.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter will discuss the composition of the sample. Various statistical analysis including Pearson r correlation, ANOVA, as well as the frequencies of salient variables will be discussed. Statistics of interest will be reported.

#### Presentation of the Findings

Table 1 presents the demographics characteristics of the participants of this study. This study consists of 30 participants (N = 30). There were more female participants than male participants. The majority of the participants were identified as Caucasian (36.7%). There was also a large group of Hispanic participants (33.3%) followed by individuals who were identified as African American (23.3). The minority of the ethnicities were Asians (6.7%) and Native Americans were not represented in this study. The mean age of the sample was  $M = 38.66$ ,  $SD = 9.596$ . The majority of participants have graduate degrees (43.3%). Individuals with some college (23.3%) and college degrees (23.3%) were equal in the study. Few participants only had high school diplomas (10%). The majority of individuals reported working in their positions for 5 or less years (40%).

Table 1. Demographics

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	7	23.3
Female	23	76.7
Ethnicity		
African American	7	23.3
Asian	2	6.7
Caucasian	11	36.7
Hispanic /Latino	10	33.3
Education level completed		
High School	3	10.0
Some College	7	23.3
College Graduate	7	23.3
Graduate Level/ Professional	13	43.3
Number of Years in Position		
0-5 years in position	12	40.0
5-10 years in position	7	23.3
10-15 years in position	6	20.0
15-20 years in position	3	10.0
20+ years in position	2	6.7

Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were conducted on the data collected. The findings from the data resulted in no significant findings to support the theory of school faculty having opposing view of confidentiality than social workers. The following are significant findings from the data collected.

An independent sample t-test compared the responses, “There should be a separate sign-in sheet for DCFS workers” and the level respondents agree. The correlation is a significant finding according to SPSS,  $t(28) = 2.363$ ,  $p < .05$ . Although this is a significant finding, the finding is not significant to the subject matter in this research study.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted on the response, “It is acceptable to utilize a student assistant to retrieve the student for the DCFS worker.” The SPSS found a modest significant difference between groups,  $F(3,26) = 6.329$ ,  $P < .05$ . Respondents were found to report they should not utilize a student assistance to retrieve the child in question. This is a significant finding but it does not reveal misperceptions of confidentiality by faculty personnel regarding this protocol.

### Summary

There were no significant findings to report from the data collected. The finding from this study did not support the argument of on-site school faculty members having different perceptions of confidentiality than social workers. Existing school policy and procedures regarding confidentiality appear sufficient when working with a foster child or child that is involved in the child welfare system.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to explore the perception of confidentiality procedure of school faculty during a visit between a child who is a dependent of the state and their social worker. Specifically this study explored ideal situation in which confidentiality efforts would need to be utilized and how school faculty members demonstrate their knowledge of maintaining the confidentiality of the student.

#### Discussion

The results of the study demonstrated little significance regarding the lack of competence of school faculty in schools when handling a visit from a social worker who is conducting a visit with a dependent child of the state. It was suspected that school faculty had different perceptions of maintaining confidentiality than social workers. Overall, the findings regarding the perceptions of confidentiality of faculty at various schools was closely equivalent to the confidentiality protocols of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). However, there are some methodological issues to consider in the findings.

The primary methodological concern to consider is the sample itself. Because the research instrument was an online anonymous survey the

researchers did not have the option to select a diverse sample representation. The researchers did not have the capability to narrow the participants to individuals that primarily dealt with social workers when entering the administrative office. The sample size was small with an under-representation of males. Although males are underrepresented there was no significant difference in their responses. In addition, the researchers had a limited amount of time to collect data.

The majority of respondents in this study indicated their perceptions of confidentiality procedure and protocols of their school of employment. The responses in the study reflected their knowledge and capabilities when dealing with a visit from a social worker on the school campus.

#### Implications for Theory

Implications for theory would consider the theory of Social Desirability for the reason participants chose to select certain answers. The researchers did not find significant issues regarding the perceptions of school faculty personnel's perception of confidentiality protocols. Social Desirability involves the bias of study participants to respond to questions, as they believe the researchers prefer. It is theorized that the respondents selected responses they believed were desired by the researchers. The consent form at the beginning of the survey instrument indicated the researchers of the study were social work students. The knowledge of being aware of the purpose of the

study may have led respondents to select responses they believed that the child welfare social workers would of desired(Osin, 2009).

#### Limitations for Future Research

This study has several limitations. The primary issue is not being aware of the employment history of the respondent and how much training the individual has received regarding confidentiality in schools. Due to this reason, there was no way to measure aspects of the employment history of the respondents and if they had employment history relevant to child welfare. The size of the sample was not large enough to determine the confidentiality protocol efforts of all schools in the area.

Although there was no indication of the lack of knowledge of confidentiality protocols of school faculty, this study cannot conclude that all school are aware of protocols when dealing with DCFS social worker visits at schools. Because the study instrument indicated this was a study conducted by social workers this could have persuaded the study participants to respond in a way they believe social worker desired. Therefore, this research study may have had a selection of responses that could have led the respondent to choose the best answer of a social worker and not a school faculty member.

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

The researchers of this study recommend future social workers with intentions to conduct a study within this spectrum, to focus in depth on the

perspectives of individuals within the school system by utilizing a qualitative study. A qualitative study may be more effective in gaining a true perception of faculty members and may give more detail of how they would follow through with their protocols. In addition, conducting a qualitative study would give the researcher the opportunity to have a more diverse study group and the opportunity to ensure the participant is a school faculty member who comes in contact with a DCFS social worker. Furthermore, a qualitative study will ensure respondents are selected from a wide range of schools to ensure diversity of demographics and unique responses. This study was broad and only focused solely on the perspectives of the school faculty. Future research should compare or incorporate the perspective of individual social workers as well as the perspective of school faculty. Therefore, by having social work participants, a baseline can be established to evaluate the confidentiality perspectives of the school faculty and staff. These two perspective could then be compared to essentially understand the misconception between the two systems. Also, It would be best practice to compare the perspectives of the participants to the actual policies and if individuals fully understand the confidentiality policies of their employment position.

### Conclusions

Confidentiality is an ongoing issue in many fields. Due to the fact there are numerous definitions and protocols regarding confidentiality, it is difficult to determine if a child's confidentiality is at risk of being breached. This is a topic

that many are inquisitive of, unfortunately the findings of this study resulted in no further insight of confidentiality in the school system. Future research is essential to better understand the different perspectives and competencies of confidentiality in the school system as well as with social workers. This study of confidentiality protocols in schools is significant as it could reveal inconsistencies in its definition and help develop a much more cohesive and consistent definition of the term confidentiality for both social workers and school faculty. The primary goal is to protect children involved in child welfare system as well as to protect the liability of the school system and of social workers.

APPENDIX A  
SAMPLE SCHOOL LETTER

## **SAMPLE SCHOOL LETTER**

Dear Principal Name:

We would like to introduce ourselves. We are Hannan Dababneh & Kalisha Vault. We are graduate students in the Social Work program at California State University, San Bernardino. For our thesis project we are interested in learning about the processes regarding confidentiality in public schools when working with children in the child welfare system. To get the information we need for our project, we are surveying school staff members who regularly interact with students, some of whom may be in the child welfare system.

We would like for your school to participate in our survey. The results of our project will not be published or reported in any way and the participation will be kept anonymous, we are simply gathering data to complete our thesis project, which is one of the requirements for obtaining our Master's degree in social work. In order for your staff to participate, we will provide them with a link to our online survey, which they can complete at their convenience at home.

The survey should take no more than 20 minutes of their time to complete and they are free to complete the survey at their convenience. If you have any questions or concerns we will be happy to address them at any time. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Hannan Dababneh & Kalisha Vault

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT

## INFORMED CONSENT

The following study is designed to investigate the policies, procedures and practices surrounding the use of confidentiality when working with dependent children in the child welfare system. The study is being conducted by Hannan Dababneh and Kalisha Vault under the supervision of Dr. Zoila Gordon, Professor of Social Work. This study has been approved by the School of Social Work Subcommittee of the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). A copy of the official Social Work IRB Committee stamp of approval should appear somewhere on this consent form.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to investigate the policies, procedures and practices surrounding the use of confidentiality when working with dependent children in the child welfare system.

**DESCRIPTION:** In this study, you will be asked to read several vignettes, which provide situations that might normally occur in the execution of your daily tasks. You will then be asked to indicate your level of agreement with several questions related to the situation provided in the vignette.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation or choose to not answer a question at any time during the study without penalty.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY:** All of your responses will remain strictly anonymous. The study results will be reported in a group format only and your name will not be identified in any publication.

**DURATION:** The questionnaire should take about 15 minutes to complete.

**RISKS:** This study entails no risks beyond those routinely encountered in daily life.

**BENEFITS:** Participation in this study does not provide any direct benefits to individual participants other than provide some insight into the policies and procedures regarding maintaining student confidentiality when working with children in the child welfare system.

**VIDEO/AUDIO/PHOTOGRAPH:** There will be no video/audio/photographs used or taken during this study.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions concerning this survey, the results, or your participation in this research please feel free to contact Dr. Zoila Gordon at (909) 537-7222 or [zgordon@csusb.edu](mailto:zgordon@csusb.edu).

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained by contacting the principle investigator at the number or email address listed above.

**CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:** I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

APPENDIX C  
DEMOGRAPHICS

## DEMOGRAPHICS

To learn more about you, please read the following questions and check the answer the best fits. Your responses will remain anonymous.

1. Gender:
  1. Male
  2. Female
  
2. Age \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Number of Years in Position
  1. 0- 5
  2. 5- 10
  3. 10- 20
  4. 20+
  
4. Education level completed
  1. High School
  2. Some college
  3. College graduate
  4. Graduate level/ professional
  
5. Ethnicity
  1. African-American
  2. Asian/Pacific Islander
  3. Hispanic/Latino
  4. Native-American
  5. Non-Hispanic White
  6. White
  7. Other

Developed by Kalisha-Koran Ayisha Vault and Hannan Mukhles Dababneh

APPENDIX D  
SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

## Sample Survey Questionnaire Vignette

Read the following vignette and answer the questions. Circle whether you highly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree, or highly disagree with the above statements.

### **Vignette 1:**

**A Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) worker enters the school administration building approaches you at the front administrative desk and tells you they need to speak with a student on school premises. The DCFS worker shows you the name of the student written on a notepad.**

### **Questions:**

1. I would have the DCFS worker sign-in on the visitor's log.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
  
2. There should be a separate sign-in sheet for DCFS workers.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
  
3. I should always inform a superior immediately regarding the student's visit with the social worker on school premises.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
  
4. I have full authority to ask why the DCFS worker visited the student at school.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
  
5. I should never take a photo copy of the DCFS workers badge during their visit.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]

**Vignette # 2**

**The DCFS worker now needs the student to come to the administrative office to be able to conduct their visit with the child. The student needs to be retrieved from the classroom and meet the DCFS worker in the front office.**

**Questions:**

6. I should verbally confirm the name of the student to the DCFS worker.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
7. I should contact the student's teacher and inform them that the student's DCFS worker is here to see them.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
8. It is acceptable to utilize a student assistant to retrieve the student for the DCFS worker.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
9. The acceptable way to retrieve a child over the load speak is: "John Doe come to the office your social worker is here to visit"  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
10. I should not disclose who the student will be visiting in the office to the student's teacher.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]

**Vignette # 3**

**The student has arrived in the administrative office. The student has a confused look on their face when entering the administrative office.**

**Questions:**

11. I should always introduce the DCFS worker to the student as their social worker once they arrive.

[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]

12. I am able to attend the visit by the request of the student if they are uncomfortable being alone with the DCFS worker.

[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]

13. The DCFS worker and the student should never be left alone.

[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]

14. I received training regarding maintaining student confidentiality during my current employment.

[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]

**Vignette # 4**

**The DCFS worker turns to you and asks for an available room to utilize to conduct their visit. You must provide a location for the DCFS worker and the student to conduct their visit.**

**Questions:**

15. If the lobby is empty the room becomes sufficient for the DCFS worker and the student to have their visit.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
  
16. The DCFS worker and the student must always utilize an empty room in the front office to conduct their visit.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
  
17. It is acceptable for the DCFS worker to conduct their visit in the school library.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
  
18. The DCFS worker may walk across the school campus with the student to get to the visit location.  
[Highly Agree] [Agree] [Neutral] [Disagree] [Highly Disagree]
  
19. I am fully knowledgeable of the procedures of my school of employment when working with DCFS workers.

APPENDIX E  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

## **DEBRIEFING STATEMENT**

The study you have just completed was devised to understand your commonly used practices when a minor client of the child welfare system is discussed in a school setting. The ultimate purpose of the study was to determine if methods of maintaining the confidential status of a student in school are adequate for maintaining confidentiality from a social work perspective.

Thank you for your participation in this study. It is not anticipated that this survey will cause any type of distress. You may contact Professor Zoila Gordan for any questions or concerns that you may have (909) 537-7222. A copy of this study will be provided to the Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino After October, 2014.

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:  
Assigned Leader: Kalisha Vault  
Assisted By: Hannan Dababneh
2. Data Entry and Analysis:  
Assigned Leader: Kalisha Vault  
Assisted By: Hannan Dababneh
3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
  - a. Introduction and Literature  
Assigned Leader: Hannan Dababneh  
Assisted By: Kalisha Vault
  - b. Methods  
Assigned Leader: Hannan Dababneh  
Assisted By: Kalisha Vault
  - c. Results  
Assigned Leader: Kalisha Vault  
Assisted By: Hannan Dababneh
  - d. Discussion  
Assigned Leader: Kalisha Vault  
Assisted By: Hannan Dababneh