Beliefs About Fatherhood Among Social Workers

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BELIEFS ABOUT FATHERHOOD AMONG SOCIAL WORKERS

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

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Abraham Ilyshuma Issac Acklin

June 2016
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Approved by:

Dr. Janet Chang M.S.W Research Coordinator
Dr. Rosemay McCaslin, Faculty Supervisor
ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to study the beliefs about fatherhood among social workers. Data for this project were gathered through separate interviews which were conducted using a sample of five individual social workers that worked with children and families. The participants were asked a series of questions regarding their beliefs about fatherhood. Ultimately, this study found that social workers believe that fathers are important and can contribute to their children’s lives in a healthy manner through emotional, educational, and financial support.

The results from this study suggest that fathers play an important role in their children’s lives and greatly contribute to their emotional, mental, financial, educational, health, and overall well being. This study also suggests that though fathers are held in high regard by the social workers in this research study, there is still a pressing need for resources and programs for fathers that support the father/child relationship. Finally, suggestions for future study include the need for quality programs focused on the needs of fathers, training for staff to involve and engage fathers, and to identify the barriers obstructing father involvement.
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I would like to thank and acknowledge all the people who not only contributed to my education over the past six and a half years, but supported me along the way with encouragement, patience, understanding and lots of empowerment.

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Thank you to all the faculty and staff that have contributed to my education and for all the support and guidance that you’ve given me over these past two years. You have made a direct impact on my life for the better.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family. Through everything we have been through, we have made it. God has blessed us in such great ways and has looked over us, opened doors for us, and has loved us unconditionally. I believe God has put each of us here for a reason and just as he has had a plan for me, he has a plan for all of us.

Without your support and guidance, I would not have had anything to strive for, motivate me, or anyone to support me. So thank you Tiffany, Makenzy and Ethan. You mean the world to me.

Abraham Acklin
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Within the field of social work, many social workers have the opportunity to work with fathers and help them maintain a healthy relationship with their children. Unfortunately many fathers in the United States do not get to have a lasting relationship with their children as they grow up. Children being raised in fatherless households have become a problem in American society. According to the Census Bureau (2011), this rate has steadily increased since 1970 and continues to be on the rise. As of today the Census Bureau (2011) reports that nearly 43% of children are raised in a fatherless home. Dawson (1988) reports that these statistics vary greatly within ethnic groups, with 73% of African American children being the highest group that have been raised without a father in the home. The percentage of Caucasian children raised in fatherless homes is 46%, Asian American 27%, Latino American 33%, and European American at 43% (Census Bureau, 2001). With the rise in fatherless homes across America, many problems related to a child’s emotional, mental, physical and economic well being have been shown to exist.

For the purpose of this study the word father will be defined as the biological father. The term “absent father” can be referred to biological fathers
who have not been involved in their children’s lives due to death, work, separation, abandonment, divorce, or prison. When fathers are taken out of the home, there are a variety of outcomes that generate between households. These outcomes can be seen as detrimental to a child’s overall well being, especially during the teenage years. The outcomes that present themselves in society are not specific to any group, class, gender or ethnicity, and can be seen across all cultures. Although there are many behaviors that can be viewed as being different for each gender, nonetheless, these behaviors stem from having an absent father. Children suffer from many maladaptive and detrimental side effects due to the absence of a father or father figure in their lives as they grow up. Not only does not having a father present in a child’s life effect their emotional state, but it has been shown to effect their mental, social, behavioral, cognitive, and academic progress as well.

Since social workers are directly and indirectly involved with fathers and their relationships that they may have with their children, they have the potential to create an impact in these households. This impact is the reason why it is important to understand how social workers perceive fathers and the relationship they have with their children. It is also important to note that the perceptions of many social workers about a father’s importance may directly affect the programs, resources, and support systems that are available and offered for supporting the father/child relationship.
Many organizations use a reactive approach concerning father absence and do not target the fathers who may be at risk of losing contact with their children, but choose to target males who have grown up in an absent father home. Pougnet (2012) suggest that initiating programs and policies that target boys who have absent fathers and further educating them at a younger age might disrupt the cycle of being an absent father themselves, but does not give insight as to what can be done to prevent fathers being absent from the home.

Analyzing the perceptions of social workers about fathers and the importance a father has in his child’s life, may give insight as to how fathers are engaged and how social workers can be better equipped to work with fathers in the community. This study also hopes to reflect the views of social workers and to examine the current programs and resources available to fathers according to these views.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the beliefs about fatherhood among social workers. Since there has been much research done on the topic of the importance of father involvement and the positive outcomes that are attributed to involved fathers, this study aims to look at the beliefs of social workers. This study is to be exploratory in nature and will take a qualitative approach when collecting its data. The participants included in this research study are social workers who work directly with families and fathers to provide supportive services. This study also hopes help to focus on strategies that can
be implemented and geared towards improving a social worker's awareness of father involvement that they can implement and add to their already vast array of knowledge. In addition, it focuses on devising training methods that are suitable, practical, and provide support for social workers as they engage fathers. This will give a social worker new tools to utilize and help them be better equipped to succeed in helping families.

This study is qualitative in nature and is meant to prompt discussion about fathers, how social workers view them, what strategies work best for engaging fathers, exploring the experiences these social workers have had with fathers, what programs are currently in place to support fathers, and what future programs may be utilized or implemented to support fathers. This study aims to look at solutions to get fathers involved by examining current research of other social worker beliefs and adding to the body of knowledge constructed by past research. This will involve looking at barriers that shy away from involving fathers, examining bias in social workers today and the impact they have on current policies, and examining the current themes social workers have about fathers based on past experiences.

With a vast body of past research showing the importance of a father, many agencies have a bias towards father involvement and are limited in the way they reach out to fathers to engage them. This may be due to a lack of knowledge, lack of support, insufficient training or lack of experience. Smith (2003) did a study on case workers from child support services who were given
formal training about the importance of father involvement and case workers who
were not given this formal training. Caseworkers who received training were
more likely than workers who did not receive training to report having located
fathers of children in the study’s sample. Significant differences were found in
some of the methods used to locate fathers. Workers who received training were
more likely to seek help from the father’s relatives, another worker, search public
aid records, and phone books. Significant differences were also found between
the two groups of workers with regard to a number of father engagement type
activities. Workers reporting training were more likely than other workers to report
sharing the case plan with the father and seeking financial assistance from him
as part of the case plan. These workers were also more likely to report the
agency considered placement with the father and that the father had expressed
interest in the child living with him.

As can be seen with this one study, one factor that encouraged father
involvement and improved a case worker’s view of a father’s role as being
important, was formal training in regards to father involvement. When assessing
social workers’ perceptions we also need to take into account their past personal
experiences, cultural factors and gender factors to determine an outcome. Since
fatherless homes are on the rise due to many factors in the United States, this
study hopes to shed light on some issues that surround the perceptions of social
workers that may guide their practice.
Significance of the project for Social Work Practice

The findings of this study will benefit social work agencies by equipping social workers with knowledge and educating them about the importance of fathers and the contribution they make to a healthy family and child relationship. This study also hopes to examine the importance of a social workers’ belief about fatherhood. This study hopes to bring awareness to other social workers who are working with fathers, and to bring encouragement in seeking to understand the importance of a father’s role to his children, family, and society, both financially and emotionally. The last finding of this study is the hope that social workers can share their stories and encourage other social workers to implement strategies to engage fathers who are struggling to maintain relationships with their children, and bring value to fatherhood by exploring the benefits of an involved father and the valuable contributions he can make to his family and society.

The beginning and assessing stages of the generalist model of social work are where the findings of this study are most beneficial. It is during these stages that social workers can explore the importance of a father and the benefits a father has to offer. By raising awareness of father involvement and how it contributes to children financially, emotionally, mentally and spiritually, social workers can be better equipped on how they can engage and develop themselves professionally to adequately support fathers and their journey through fatherhood. This may help assess current strategies and policies in
place that may not best fit fathers today and help support them with building relationships with their children or getting involved in support services that build cohesiveness between father, mother and child.

Although the vast body of prior research points to fathers as being a great influence and primary factor to their child’s development of self, their psychological, emotional, behavioral, physical and economic wellbeing, it also points out that having an involved father plays a crucial role in his own mental, emotional, and physical health as well. Ultimately this study attempts to answer the question “How do social workers perceive the importance of fathers towards their children, the mother of their children, and the economy?” By answering this question the study will benefit social work agencies by illuminating how fathers contribute to the family structure, the economic structure, and obtain suggestions from seasoned social workers on how to engage fathers and advocate for policy change to increase father importance.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this section the literature from past research and the findings of the effects of father absence will be explored in relation to the effect father absence has on children, single mothers left to raise children, and the impact this has on the economy. This review of the literature will also encompass in depth the effects an absent father has on boys and girls at different stages in life and how father involvement can change the course of these behaviors. In light of the consequences father absence brings, social work perspectives of fathers and their important contributions will be explored through attachment theory and social learning theory and how it relates to mental, social, and emotional well being in children as they grow into adults. In conclusion this literature review will take a look at how social workers and other agencies are engaging fathers with resources, programs, and couples therapy to increase father involvement and family cohesion.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Today America is faced with a tragedy that has been around for a very long time, but has begun to really take flight beginning in the 1970’s. Absent fathers due to divorce in the biological family has swept the nation rapidly and has continued to increase at a steady rate. Absent fathers from the home can be
caused from many things such as death, work, separation, abandonment, and prison. According to Debell (2008) at least 50% of the children living in the United States will grow up without their biological father in the home. When ethnicity was looked at, 28% percent of White children, 39% of Hispanic children, and 69% of Black children, currently live without their fathers. When looking at Black children in the United States, the number of children that grow up without a father in the home is not merely due to divorce, but due to the fact that the mother and father of the child were never married and merely cohabitated for a brief period of time.

When divorce in America is looked at today, it is found that a great number of fathers are taken out of the home and left to pay child support and spousal support as well as any other necessary expenses that need to be taken care of (Debell, 2008). This can pay a toll on the amount of social time and relational time a father can spend with his child/children. According to Chiles (2013) many fathers are left working two jobs or more to support the family and home that they once lived in, leaving no time for social interactions between the father and child. In 1990 the divorce rate had been just under 50%, but has now moved upwards of 60% (Harper, 2004). This statistical figure is not accounting for mothers and fathers who had never been married. As divorce becomes more common in America, youth are left without a paternal figure to look up to and learn from in life.
This problem does not occur equally across ethnicities or gender. In Debell (2008) we can see that black children have a far greater risk of growing up without a father than any other ethnicity. When looking at gender, males were far more likely to grow up without a father than females were. There are no known reasons as to why there is a discrepancy between males and females. When socio economic status (SES) was taken into account, research from Harper (2004) showed that divorce or separation is more likely to occur in lower SES neighborhoods than in higher SES neighborhoods. This may be due to the fact that income can play a significant part in the relationship between husband and wife, the amount of stress that the lack of income can put on a relationship and to many divorce seems to be the plausible outcome to deal with the amount of stress that is put on the family.

When fathers are taken out of the home, there are many outcomes that generate between households. These outcomes can be seen as detrimental to children’s overall well being, especially during the teenage years. The outcomes that present themselves in society are not group, class, gender or ethnicity specific, but can be seen across cultures that can stem from divorced families. Although behaviors can be seen as being different for each gender, nonetheless, these behaviors stem from divorce or separation of both parents.

It is important to understand this problem, not only as a household or family problem, but on a bigger scale of an economic problem in America today. This not only affects the immediate family, specifically the children, but the
impact of an absent father affects the economy as a whole. According to the Census Bureau (2011) 28% of children living in a single mother household live below the national poverty line. The Census Bureau (2011) shows that 27% of women who divorced made less than $25,000 a year and 23% of divorced women reported they were on government assistance programs to support themselves and children. When the father leaves the home, the mother assimilates the title of “breadwinner” and “caretaker” and performs the responsibilities required by both titles, which is difficult, and many times results in the mother relying on government assistance to make ends meet (Ames, 2014). To understand this problem and its implications on society, a shift needs to be made to address the problem from the beginning and not working or addressing the problem after the event has occurred. In short, the problems that organizations of interest should address are not the problems that are related to father absence, but instead the focus should be shifted to address the problem of a father being absent from the home and what factors contribute to that father’s absence. This requires a proactive approach in supplying preventative approaches to the problem rather than taking a reactive approach after the damage to families and in extension, society, has already occurred.

In the research articles that will be discussed, the problems absent fathers pose to women and children, and in a larger aspect how father absence affects the economy as a whole. As Debell (2008) indicates in his study that the impact of father absence has on boys and girls is different, it is careful to note that both
have negative outcomes. Some of these problems that were obtained from the United States Department of Health and Human services (USDHHS) showed that 43% of US children live without their father, 90% of homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes, 71% of pregnant teenagers lack a father, 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes, 85% of children who exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes, 71% of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes, 75% of adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes, 70% of juveniles in state operated institutions have no father, 85% of youths in prisons grew up in a fatherless home. To further substantiate these claims a more detailed perspective of how father absence affects females and males separately must be discussed.

Krohn (2001) observed daughters of absent fathers and their behaviors and progress in school from kindergarten to college. Krohn (2001) found that women without fathers become desperate for male attention and have a constant need for male attention. Women who grew up without their father were found to be more critical of males as adults, have intensified separation anxiety, produced lower scores on tests throughout school and were more likely to drop out of school when compared to women who had a father present. Similar studies have found even more tragic statistics of daughters who grow up without a father. In the same study Krohn (2001) found that girls who did not have a father figure were more likely to marry as teenagers, cohabitate with the opposite sex, more likely to have children as teenagers, more likely to divorce and become a single
parent, have aggressive behavior, engage in risky behavior, more likely to engage in promiscuous behavior, and get pregnant at a younger age.

Implications of these two studies indicate that a father's presence is crucial to the upbringing of females (Krohn, 2001).

In the research article just discussed, East (2007) went over some of the behaviors and thoughts older women experienced as a result of not growing up with their father in the home. In a study conducted in America and New Zealand (2003) Ellis, Bates, Dodge, Ferguson, Horwood, Pettit and Woodward looked at the risk father absence had on teenage girls engaging in early sexual activity and resulting in teenage pregnancy. Ellis et al. (2003) found that America and New Zealand had the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Western industrialized societies with America showing that 10% of teenage girls get pregnant and 7% of teenage girls end up pregnant at or before their 18th birthday. In this study, over 700 girls were followed from age five to eighteen years of age. This study looked at the association between the timing of biological father absence and the increased risk of early sexual activity and pregnancy in daughters. The study found that the earlier daughters experienced father absence, the more likely they were to engage in sexual activity and get pregnant before the age of 16.

In another study done by Krohn (2001), it researched the behaviors of girls who had absent biological fathers. Krohn (2001) interviewed over 400 girls from 4 years old to 20 years old. Not only did Krohn find similar findings to Ellis et al. (2003) but also found that women who grew up without a father were more likely
to drop out of high school, use drugs, not seek marriage in a relationship, and were more likely to cohabitate. Krohn (2001) goes on to explain that women who grew up without their father were found to be more critical of males, have intensified separation anxiety, and produced lower scores on tests throughout school when compared to women who had a father present. Now that the effects of absent fathers have on females has been shown in more detail, in the next section, the effects that absent fathers have on males will be discussed.

When researching boys without fathers and comparing them to boys who had fathers, many differences were observed that were just as detrimental as the females outcomes were. Debell (2007) reported similar findings that sought the outcomes of children who are living without fathers. In this study Debell found that boys living without fathers were more likely to display aggressive behavior, more likely to become involved in crime or violence, more likely to have psychological problems, emotional problems, and have gender identity issues. In 1999 the National Center for Fathering (as cited in Debell, 2001) released statistics on the general population of boys who have absent fathers and found that boys are six times more likely to have learning disabilities, three times more likely to be drug addicts, four times more likely to be diagnosed mentally disturbed, twelve times more likely to murder, 50% more likely to die in a car accident, boys younger than 15 years of age are twice as likely to be admitted to psychiatric hospitals, boys younger than 15 are five times more likely than girls to kill themselves, boys compromise 90% of those in drug treatment programs, and
boys represent 95% of cases in juvenile court. These numbers are staggering, and when armed with the knowledge of these statistics, a social worker has a greater chance of planning a successful outcome for their clients.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will address the research methods utilized in conducting this study. Specifically, this section will describe in detail the design of the study, sampling methods used, the interview instrument, data collection, procedures, as well as protection of human subjects. Additionally, this chapter will discuss issues regarding qualitative analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study is to explore the beliefs about fatherhood among social workers. Available literature on the subject of the importance of fatherhood and social work beliefs shows how important a father is in a child’s life, and that generally, a social worker shows positive regard towards fathers and their involvement with their children. This study will allow for social workers to give their expert opinion on their beliefs about fathers and the importance of their role as a father.

This study employed a qualitative design consisting of separate interviews with five social workers that work directly with families and have experience working directly with fathers and engaging them in family services. Through these interviews open discussion conversation was established about the importance of fathers and the beliefs these social workers had about fathers.
based on their experience in the field. It was predicted that these interviews will show the importance of fathers in a child’s life and that a father has such a unique role in the family system that without a father in a child’s life, a pattern of destructive behavior can be seen in father absent households. Thus, these interviews provided the most practical means through which to obtain social workers beliefs about fatherhood. Interviews provided a much more focused atmosphere, detailed conversation, and a chance for social workers to give their opinion without judgment. Although this study will only consist of five social workers, it provided great insight to the beliefs that a social worker holds towards fathers, and their involvement with their children. It is not indicative towards the notion that all social workers find the role of a father important in a child's life.

Sampling

This study sample consisted of five social workers employed throughout Southern California. These social workers had current and prior experience supplying family services and child welfare as well as experience working directly with fathers and involving them in the services offered to families through the county. This sample and strict criteria was chosen so that the knowledge and responses shared through these interviews would be informative as well as educational in order to show the beliefs of social workers about the importance of fatherhood through personal experience. Without the criteria being met, the beliefs about fatherhood would have lacked depth and accurate knowledge about the beliefs of fatherhood amongst social workers, and therefore not be a fair
representation of the belief held about fathers. Without the benefit of the accrued experience of a seasoned social worker, particularly in this area of expertise, he/she would not have been able to give an accurate statement about fathers due to limited experience, no experience at all, or may have given uneducated beliefs based on interactions outside of their social work practice.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data collection for this study was conducted using single interviews which compromised of five social workers. Interviews were based on the time and availability of each social worker and their proximity to a location that would adequately serve as a private interview room. Interview questions were proposed to each social worker which was an instrument (Appendix B) compromised of 12 questions that were used to elicit answers from each social worker. The questions were ordered in a logical manner as to build on each prior theme discussed so it will encourage reflection on personal experiences throughout their career. The questions presented in appendix A were personally created by Abraham Acklin and verified by supervisor Dr. Rosemary McCaslin. The lack of experience of the data collector and his research experience may have contributed to the lack of in depth questions or topics that were used to collect data and provoke conversation amongst each social worker.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked demographic questions (Appendix A) in which they stated their age, gender, years of experience, level of education, and level of experience with fathers. Due to the
small sample size, this study is not an equal representation of the general social work population.

Procedures

To obtain this sample, for convenience purposes, social workers known by colleagues were asked to participate. Participants were elicited through social media, text message, and personal phone calls. Participants were informed that there were no benefits or rewards to participate in this interview. Each participant was screened prior to setting up each interview to make sure they met the criteria needed to participate in this study. Participants that did not fit the criteria were not able to participate in this study. Each participant needed to have current experience in providing family services, child welfare services, and work directly with fathers by involving them in the services offered to families through the county.

The individual interviews were conducted in March 2016 at social work agencies in which the social worker was currently employed. The interviews were conducted using a 12 question instrument. Each interview was estimated to last 30 to 40 minutes, depending on the conversation and time in which participants will be able to stay and contribute due to their daily time constraints.

To capture data, a digital recording device was used and a consent form (Appendix C) was distributed and signed by the participant in order to obtain permission to use a recording device during the interview. After the interview,
transcription of the data will be processed and interpreted in the final results section.

Protection of Human Subjects

Since this study required direct questioning and participation of possible county and state employed individuals, it was not possible to protect the participant’s identity. Every effort was made to maintain participant confidentiality. However each social workers identity or any identifiable information was not collected. During each interview, limited information was asked from each social worker, therefore limiting any identifiable information that may have been spoken of during each interview. At no time were participants names connected with any data provided.

All participants received an informed consent form (Appendix C) in which the nature of the study, voluntary participation, risks, and benefits were outlined. Additionally participants received a debriefing statement (Appendix D) at the conclusion of the interview and were provided with a number to call should they need any follow up information.

All data, including recordings of the focus group/groups, filed notes, and transcribed data were securely stored in a locked file cabinet and not accessible to anyone who was not involved in conducting this study. Additionally, all data that can be used to identify any participants was destroyed at the conclusion of this study.
Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was conducted using a qualitative analysis technique. Five separate interviews were conducted during this research study. The participants of this study consisted of social workers who have had direct exposure to helping families with services, and have had exposure with fathers and engaged them in family services as well. Beverages were served as participants engaged in an interview pertaining to the 12 questions outlined in appendix B. The interview revolved around the beliefs social workers have about fatherhood. A digital recording device was used to record the entire session to ensure accuracy of the information obtained from the discussion. Researchers went over the collected data to identify any themes, patterns, or recurrent categories that emerged. These themes were then grouped into categories and analyzed for any possible relationships or similarities and differences that existed. In addition to the information gathered in the interview, the researcher compiled nominal descriptive statistics on the participants themselves such as age, gender, years of experience, level of education, and level of experience working with fathers.

Summary

In this chapter we have addressed the research methods which will be used in conducting this study on the beliefs of social workers about fatherhood. The design of the study, sampling methods that were used, the interview instrument, data collection analysis, procedures, the human subjects, and
confidentiality were discussed. In addition to these topics discussed, limitations and benefits of this study were examined.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Introduction

This study explored the beliefs about fatherhood among social workers. Participants in this study represented various age groups, years of experience, education levels, ethnicities, and different levels of experience working directly with fathers. Additionally, the five individuals represented in this study come from different counties across Southern California such as San Diego County, San Bernardino county, and Riverside County, and are involved on multiple levels in the Children and Family Services Department.

Presentation and Findings

The five participants in this study were individually interviewed on five separate occasions. At the beginning of each interview each participant was asked demographic questions to obtain the following information: age, gender, sexual orientation, level of education, marital status, job title, and the number of cases they are involved in that have fathers present.

The demographic characteristics of the participants are as follows. There were five females. The age group of the participants ranged from 27 to 44 years old with the average age of the participants being 33.8 years. With regard to education, all of the participants indicated that they were college graduates. Participants one, two and three indicated that they had their bachelors in social
work (Participants 1, 2 & 3, March 2016). Participant four indicated they had received their BSW and anticipates they will receive their MSW in June 2016 (Participant 4, March 2016). Participant five indicated they had received their MSW (Participant 5, March 2016). The professional titles and years of experience for each participant are as follows: Psychiatric Social Work Trainee with two years experience, Assistant Regional Manager with 21 years experience, Child Social Services Worker V with two years experience, Protective Service Worker with three years experience, and Senior Protective Services Worker with five years experience. Participant two and three indicated they were married (Participant 2 & 3, March 2016). Participant one indicated they were divorced (Participant 1, March 2016). Participant four stated she was single, and participant five stated she lived in a cohabitating relationship (Participant 4 & 5, March 2016). All five of the participants reported they were heterosexual. Participant responses varied when asked how many of their cases required them to engage with fathers. Participant one indicated they were engaged with fathers 100% of the time, participant two 80% of the time, participant three 60% of the time, participant four 50% of the time, and participant five 40% of the time (Participant 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5, March 2016).

As previously discussed, the criteria for participation in this study required the participant to be a social worker, and have direct contact with fathers and families. For this reason, participants were asked open ended questions to elicit responses regarding their beliefs about fatherhood and their involvement with
fathers. These questions addressed the social workers’ perception of the importance of father involvement, the tools and techniques used to engage fathers, their use of programs and resources that are given to the fathers they supply services to, and their experience working with families who do not have a father present in the family’s life.

**Importance of Having an Engaged Father**

Participants were asked how important they believed a father to be in a child’s life? Among all five participants was a consensus that fathers are very important in a child’s life. Participant one stated that “the children I see without a father look as if they are always missing something, like a sense of their identity. The children I do see with fathers are less likely to have outbursts, and less likely to get in trouble” (Participant 1, March 2016). Participant three stated that “having a father in a child’s life, especially their education, because it not only shows academic support but emotional support too” (Participant 3, March 2016). Participant five stated “I believe it is important to have both parents present in a child’s life. But with the two cases I have right now, these two boys do not have a father and have parallel behaviors. Both have gone AWOL and are now in juvenile hall” (Participant 5, March 2016). None of the participants stated that a father is not important in a child’s life. The main theme that participants agreed upon was that having a father is important in a child’s life.
The next question asked participants what contributions they see fathers making in their children’s lives? The consensuses between all the participants were that positive contributions were made by fathers in their child’s life. Participant two stated that “the children with involved fathers listen better and do their homework because they hear their dad say they need to do it” (Participant 2, March 2016). Participant three agreed and stated that “dads offer emotional and academic support” (Participant 3, March 2016). One of the main themes that emerged in this area was financial support. Three out of five participants agreed that fathers mainly contribute with finances. Participant three went on to say, “mom doesn't have to stress too much about how to get the bills, she can focus her attention on raising the kids and making sure their educational needs are being met” (Participant 3, March 2016). This statement showed that fathers were not only contributing to their child’s life, but also the life of their significant other.

The last question asked participants how important they felt it was for a father to be involved in their children’s education? All the participants agreed that it was important for fathers to be involved in their child’s education. Participant five stated that “when the children come in, they have said several times that they do their homework because their dad says it is important to get good grades and be successful” (Participant 5, March 2016). Participant four shared that “when they generally see a father involved in education, the child seems to pay attention more in class and turn in all their work” (Participant 4,
The consensus that it is important to have fathers involved in their child’s education was agreed upon between all participants.

**Programs, Resources and Tactics Used to Engage Fathers**

The next set of questions for the participants focused on engaging fathers, and programs and resources that are offered to fathers. Participants were first asked what kinds of tactics they use to engage fathers? Three out of the five participants stated that they would engage fathers with friendly rapport building strategies, such as open ended questions about their children, smiling, shaking their hand, being polite, and offering them resources if they needed them.

Participant one stated “my organization had formal training for engaging fathers and utilizing different techniques to engage with fathers. Some of these tactics included helping fathers set goals, treating them as equal partners in cases and inviting them to participate in the programs resources” (Participant 1, March 2016). Participant five stated that “some of the tactics that have been helpful for my office are consistent communication, appointment setting based on the fathers schedule, encouragement, inclusion of family therapy, and direct questions towards the father to help him feel included in the process” (Participant 5, March 2016). The main theme that emerged between all participants is that involving fathers to participate in the program was important to them.

After participants were asked how they engaged with fathers, they were asked what programs they see in their organization that benefit fathers and support the relationship they have with their children? All five participants stated
that they see parenting programs as the number one program that benefits the father child relationship. Participant two stated that the parenting classes they have seen are “geared towards mothers or give general overviews of parenting, but none are specific towards fatherhood” (Participant 2, March 2016).

Participant one stated that the parenting classes given in their organization are “good and rich in research driven effective parenting techniques, but very few fathers take advantage of the free class” (Participant 1, March 2016). Parenting classes appeared to be the main focus, if not the most favorable resource for fathers in order to support the father/child relationship.

The next question focused on the programs that participants did not see, but would be helpful for fathers. Participants were asked what types of programs do you not see that would be helpful to better engage fathers? Four of the participants stated that they would like to see father support groups in the community (Participant 2, 3, 4 & 5, March 2016). More specifically, these four participants noted that many fathers do not get the kind of treatment mothers do when it comes to having new babies and the changes a father goes through. Instead these support groups are focused on what changes the mother is going to go through. Participant four stated that “there are many resources out there, but none directly towards fathers. What I would like to see, are educational programs that provide funds for fathers who would like to go back for a higher education, maybe grants or scholarships” (Participant 4, March 2016). The main theme that stood out in the conversation with participants was that fathers do not
get the type of group support they need from other fathers. Mainly, social
workers agreed that there is a need for support services for father groups.

The last question in this category asked the participants, “In your opinion,
do you feel fathers have a sufficient amount of resources?” Participant two and
three responded that “yes, fathers do have a sufficient amount of resources
available to them but are typically uneducated about the resources they have as
fathers” (Participant 2 & 3, March 2016). Participants one and four responded
that in their scope of practice, they “do not see a sufficient amount of resources
provided or offered to fathers in comparison to mothers. Mothers have much
more resources available to them through not only the county, but also the health
care system and many religious organizations” (Participant 1 & 4, March 2016).
Participant four added that “out of the seven shelters in the area, only one of
them will accept a man to stay there” (Participant 4, March 2016). Participant
five stated “the resources and programs available to men, including fathers,
seem to be limited. The programs and resources offered are narrowly consisted
of Alcohol Anonymous programs, 12 step programs, substance use programs,
anger management, perpetrator domestic violence and sexual abuse programs.
Not only are the programs and resources limited, but very specific to negative
behavior focused areas and not strengths based” (Participant 5, March 2016).
Two major themes emerged here between participants. The first theme
suggested that there are enough resources for men, and the last one stated
there are enough resources, but possibly not the right type of resources.
Involved Fathers

The next set of questions focused on the number of times each participant encountered with fathers who are engaged with their children, fathers who are not engaged with their children, and single fathers. The first question the participants were asked was how often they encountered single fathers? Participants one, two and four stated they “had not encountered any single fathers” (Participant 1, 2 & 4, March 2016). Participants three and five stated “I encounter single fathers quite often in their line of work” (Participant 3 & 5, March 2016). The next question posed was how often are participants were involved with cases that had fathers who were engaged in the process? Participant two stated “I have not had any cases that involved any fathers, engaged or non engaged” Participant 2, March 2016). Participants three and five stated “many of the fathers that come in on cases are primarily not engaged until the participant engages them and gets them to be involved in the process” (Participant 3 & 5, March 2016). Participant three stated “fathers generally seem to not want to get involved whether it is from not having the time because of work, or they feel they do not feel they belong in the county receiving services” (Participant 3, March 2016). Participant five stated “there are many times when I engage with fathers who are involved because at the beginning of the case the other parent runs off, and he is the only parent left to engage with. So by default, he is automatically engaged” (Participant 5, March 2016). When these two questions are looked at, the theme of fathers being engaged changes depending on whether another
parent is present. When the other parent is present, it may take a little time to get the father engaged. When the other parent is not present, the father will be engaged from the beginning and little persuasion is needed.

**Behaviors and Dynamics of Fatherless Homes**

The next question dealt with the observations each participant had on the family in the cases they were involved with. Participants were asked when they have a case that involves children and there is no father present in their lives, what types of behaviors do they see in the family dynamics of that child? Participant four recalled two cases she had worked on that did not have fathers present. Participant four went onto say “these two boys had anger issues, aggressive behavior, no impulse control, got in constant fights at school, consistent yelling at teachers, drug use, and little to no healthy relationships with the opposite sex. These two males were sent to juvenile hall and ironically became friends while they were there. It seems that their shared experiences brought them together” (Participant 4, March 2016). Participant five stated that “many of my cases involve step fathers, or multiple children which all have different fathers” (Participant 5, March 2016). Participant three stated “the children I run across who never knew their bio dad seem to be ok, but confused when they engage with their step dad or a male who is acting like the head male figure in the home” (Participant 3, March 2016). Participant five stated that “some of the behaviors exhibited are aggressive behavior, drug use, violent outbursts, yelling, low impulse control, being easily angered and craves a need for
attention” (Participant 5, March 2016). Participants one and two stated they had not encountered any severe behaviors in boys, but stated “the females I encounter no matter how young are consistently craving attention from other males” (Participant 1 & 2, March 2016). The major theme that participants were able to vocalize was that without a father present in a child’s life, there can be many types of negative behaviors displayed by children and they can be different for males and females.

The Changing Role of Fathers in Today’s Culture

The next area that participants were asked about were the roles of fathers. Participants were asked how have you seen the role of fathers change over the past 20 years? Three of the participants identified as being too young to give an accurate account of information pertaining to how fathers roles have changed over the past 20 years. Participant one stated that “the culture of dads has changed over the past 20 years because we see a lot more stay at home fathers these days” (Participant 1, March 2016). Participant two stated “the culture surrounding fathers has changed to try and empower them, but I see a lot of fathers that don’t know their rights in court and think the mother gets to make all the decisions, but now we see a lot of father rights lawyers coming into play. I guess it’s because fathers always got the shaft in family law court” (Participant 2, March 2016). The theme in this area showed that dads are being empowered in different ways that impact the culture of fatherhood. First, fathers are starting to realize they have more rights in court than they thought and the second is that
fathers are feeling more empowered in today’s culture to be in their children's lives, despite the difficulties men face.

**Advice to Future Social Workers Working with Fathers**

After exploring these topics about fathers and giving participants a chance to reflect on their role as social workers who directly work with and supply services for fathers, they were asked “If you could give advice to other social workers about working with fathers and their importance, what would it be?” Participant one stated “it is a lot of work to find fathers sometimes, but take the opportunity to explore options and exploring those fathers out there, wherever they are, take the time to look for them” (Participant 1, March 2016). Participant two responded with a similar dialogue stating “always make diligent efforts to contact that father, not just because he works late, make that 8:00 o’clock phone call because they always have something to contribute” (Participant 2, March 2016).

Participants three and four had common themes about their responses stating, “be aware of your biases” and “leave your biases at the door or they can really affect your work” (Participant 3 & 4, March 2016). Participant five stated “know your resources for your clients, especially fathers” (Participant 5, March 2016). The last theme that emerged was that social workers believed that fathers participation in the process is very important, so therefore the advice participants gave to other social workers reflected the belief that fathers are important.
Summary

The beliefs about fatherhood from the perspective of social workers participating in this research project became very clear. The theme of how important fathers are in a child's life emerged as the number belief social workers held during each interview. Participants were able to support this belief with personal experiences they have had with clients which showed the important contributions fathers make in the areas of financial, emotional, and educational support.

The second most prominent theme that stood out was the amount of resources, types of resources and lack of meaningful resources fathers have. Fathers appear to be at a disadvantage when it comes to the number of resources and programs that help support the father/child relationship, empower fathers, and support fathers in terms of emotional support, housing support, and relational support. Despite the importance social workers hold on fathers and the relationships they have with their children, programs and resources seem do not support the same belief.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this section the findings presented in Chapter Four are discussed. In addition, limitations of this study will be discussed, including small sample size, lack of random sampling, convenience sampling, and a non representative sample.

Discussion

Throughout the research process, several themes continued to emerge as beliefs about fatherhood among social workers. There was one main theme throughout the interviews that was continually discussed and/or emphasized by each participant. The main theme was that social workers believe that fatherhood is important. To build on this belief, four subcategories were identified and discussed. These four subcategories were programs, resources and tactics used to engage fathers, contributions fathers make, behaviors and dynamics of fatherless children, and advice for future social workers.

Time and time again participants stressed the importance of fathers and the contributions they make in a child's life. Included in the discussion with participants were the side effects for children when they do not have a father present in their lives. Some of these behaviors included aggression, lack of emotional control, emotional instability, lack of self worth, drug use, risky
behavior, and consistent encounters with law enforcement. This is consistent with the findings in the literature which examines some of the side effects children have who are raised without fathers (Debell, 2007).

In addition to social workers beliefs that fathers are important in the lives of their children, participants had mixed feelings and beliefs about whether or not fathers have enough resources that contribute to father involvement. It was believed that fathers do not have enough resources to support the father/child relationship, and last, the programs that are available for fathers may be the wrong type of programs to assist in the nurturance of the father/child relationship. Consistent with the literature found in Smith (2003) about issues and “Possibilities of Working with Men from a Child and Youth Care Perspective,” resources for fathers are not quite as abundant as they are for mothers.

Many of the participants held positive regard for fathers and identified several tactics they personally use to engage fathers. Some participants stated that they will include them in the process of the case management, talk to them directly, whether it is over the phone or in person, and ask them questions to get them engaged in the participation of reuniting the family and taking care of the children in each case. Just as Saleh (2013) points out in her research about “Child Welfare Professionals' Experiences in Engaging Fathers in Services,” many of the tactics used by the participants were consistent with the tactics used in this research. Some of these tactics include talking to the father directly and asking direct questions, asking fathers to participate in parenting classes, asking
the father for his input about his child, and keeping open and consistent communication throughout the length of the case.

Last, participants stressed the importance of fathers by offering advice to future social workers when engaging fathers. Participants looked at the positive attributes fathers can add to the positive outcomes of family reunification by stating that future social workers should seek out fathers and actively engage with them to obtain active participation for the well being of children. Saleh (2013) points out that actively engaging fathers to participate in services resulted in a decrease of child disruptions at school and at home. This appears to be consistent with the findings of this research project.

Limitations

In this research project, the small sample size used can be seen as a major limitation. The projected sample size for this project was aimed to recruit 25 or more social workers. Due to a lack of response, only five social workers were recruited and interviewed. This may prevent the findings of this research from being generalized to the population of social workers who work with children and families.

Another limitation to this study was the demographics of the sample population. The sample consisted of all females, with a mean of 6.6 years of experience, and a mean age of 33.3 years. This small sample size may not best represent the vast majority of social workers who work in this field, and may not
reflect the same opinions and responses of the general population of social workers.

The limitations discussed prevented the researcher from obtaining complete random sampling. A convenience sample was used and participants were recruited via colleagues, social media, and respondents were chosen on a first come first serve basis. As stated before, the intended research project was aimed to include 25 or more social workers, but only five social workers were used in this research project.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Though the professional literature related to beliefs about fatherhood among social workers is sparse, the existing literature focuses on engagement strategies and social work efforts to include fathers in case planning. Included in this literature is a focus on training social workers to effectively involve fathers in case planning. There has been previous literature like Saleh (2013) which looks at groups of social workers that go through formal training on effective ways to involve and engage fathers. This study looks at the beliefs of social workers before training is administered, and after training is administered. This study found that social workers were more likely to engage and involve fathers as well as hold them in higher regard after the training.

Based on the results of this study and the direct responses given by the social workers who participated in the interview process, there is currently a need
to educate more social works about engaging fathers and providing resources that are supportive of the father/child relationship. The education of these social workers could occur through the implementation of training classes designed to address effective ways to interact with fathers and help them engage in the case planning process. These trainings can include effective techniques to communicate, cultural barriers that prohibit fathers from being engaged in the case planning process, overcoming biases of social workers, and benefits to having fathers involved. Another beneficial area to focus on would be styles of communication among fathers and their perception of social work case planning.

To address the lack of proper resources that should support fathers to have a nurturing and thriving relationship with their children, effective fathering programs in the community can be introduced to county social workers, and the proper resources to sustain these programs can be introduced. Some of these programs may include parenting classes directed towards fathers and focused on a fathers role in the family system. Another program that can be introduced to help fathers are classes that are designed around challenges for fathers in health care systems, child education systems, legal systems, and obtaining prior resources in the community.

For social workers to better themselves when engaging with fathers, educational trainings such as cultural awareness classes, barriers to father involvement trainings, inter agency programs and resources for father classes, and classes that focus on retention skills to father involvement is needed. These
classes would primarily focus and equip social workers with the tools necessary to help fathers develop and nurture healthy relationship with their children, and help them utilize the necessary resources in their community and county service agencies.

Future studies on this topic may benefit from conducting research with larger population sizes and a more representative sample of social workers. In addition to research being conducted on social workers, future research should also include the needs of fathers in case planning, barriers to involvement, and beliefs about programs and resources among fathers.

Furthermore, issues including the lack of cultural competence about fatherhood among social workers needs to be addressed in future research. Social workers can benefit their future engagement tactics, perceptions of fathers, and support families for better outcomes when addressing the issue of cultural competence about fatherhood.

Conclusion

This research was conducted to study beliefs about fatherhood among social workers. Data for this study was gathered from five social workers that work directly with families. Convenience sampling was used by word of mouth from colleagues, sending emails, and using social media. Social workers were screened before the interview process in order to depict if they fit the criteria for this research study. Participants were accepted on a first come first serve basis.
The participants were asked a series of questions regarding their beliefs about fatherhood. The results of this research support previous research that indicates social workers perceive fathers as important individuals when it comes to case planning, mental, emotional, and cognitive well being of their children, and that there are a lack of effective resources for fathers when it comes to nurturing the father/child relationship.

The results of this study suggest that social workers hold fathers in high regard and that some of the success towards healthy family relationships, and a child's well being is centered upon the involvement of the father in case planning. Additionally this study suggests the need for more effective and quality resources and programs that support fathers in their journey of fatherhood. This study also suggests the need for a higher standard of training for social workers to help them develop tools to engage fathers and be more culturally sensitive to the needs of fathers.

Suggestions for future study include qualitative studies to address the lack of quality programs available for fathers, the beliefs fathers have about current resources and programs, as well as more exploratory research that involves a larger and more representative sample of social workers.
APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS
Participant Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your sexual orientation?
4. What is your Level of education?
5. What is your current job title?
6. What is your current Marital Status?
7. How often are you involved with cases that involve absent fathers?

Developed by Abraham Acklin (2016)
APPENDIX B

INSTRUMENT
Instrument

1. How often are you involved with cases that involve involved fathers?

2. When you have a case that involves children, and there is no father present, what types of behaviors do you see in the family dynamics of that child?

3. How important would you say a father is in a child’s life?

4. In your field of practice, what types of contributions do you see fathers offering to their children?

5. How important is it for a father to be involved in his child’s education?

6. How have you seen the role of fathers change over the past 20 years?

7. What kinds of tactics do you use in your practice to engage fathers?

8. What programs do you see that benefit fathers and support the relationship they have or want with their children?

9. What types of programs do you see or do not see, that would be helpful to better engage fathers?

10. How often do you encounter single fathers?

11. If you could give advice to other social workers about working with fathers and their importance, what would it be?

12. In your opinion and scope of practice, do you feel fathers have a sufficient amount of resources?

Developed by Abraham Acklin (2016)
INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the beliefs social workers about fatherhood. This study is being conducted by Abraham Acklin under the supervision of Professor Rosemarie Meeceaslin, Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the School of Social Work subcommittee of the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to examine the beliefs about fatherhood among social workers. Since there has been much research done on the topic of the importance of father involvement and the positive outcomes that are attributed to involved fathers, this study aims to look at the beliefs of social workers. This study is to be exploratory in nature and will take a qualitative approach when collecting its data. A focus group will be made up of at least 12 social workers who currently or who have worked with engaging fathers in the past. This study also hopes help to focus on strategies that can be implemented towards social workers to add to their vast array of knowledge about fathers, and devise training methods that are suitable for social workers to help support them as they engage fathers, and give them new tools of support to succeed in helping families.

DESCRIPTION: Social workers will be asked questions to prompt discussion between each other about their own beliefs about fatherhood. Through this dialogue, other themes or topics may come up about personal beliefs, personal experiences, and examples of how you have engaged with fathers in the past.

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.

CONFIDENTIAL: No names will be associated with quotes or statements taken from the interview as to identify a specific participant. All collected data will be kept in a locked box. The audio recordings will be destroyed 3 years after the project has ended.

DURATION: The expected participation time for this group interview may range from 30 minutes to 120 minutes. The expected duration time to collect demographic data for this research study should last no more than 5 minutes.

RISKS: No anticipated harm will emerge as a consequence of this study.

BENEFITS: Participants in this study may increase the awareness of the beliefs about fatherhood among social workers.

AUDIO: I understand that this research will be audio recorded Initials___ and/or I understand that this research will be photographed Initials___.

CONTACT: (if you seek further assistance for answers to pertinent questions about the research and research subjects’ rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, Please contact Professor Rosemary Meeceaslin at (909) 537-5507.
RESULTS: If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Pfau Library at the end of Spring Quarter of 2016.

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:

I have read the information above and agree to participate in your study.

SIGNATURE: Please do not include your signature, but only your initials, as this study is anonymous.

Initials: ______________ Date: __________
APPENDIX D
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Debriefing Statement

This group of social workers was established in order to gain a clear and concise understanding about the beliefs social workers have towards fatherhood. The importance of fatherhood cannot be undermined in today’s society because of the price children pay when fathers are absent. The belief about fatherhood among social workers is an important topic that needs to be addressed in order to further help fathers and their families. Social workers working with fathers need to understand the importance of father involvement in order to contribute to families being healthier and happier. It is important to understand these issues further so that we may be able identify false beliefs social workers have about fathers and what, if any, interventions or trainings can be designed to address these false beliefs.

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate beliefs about fathers; you have just helped the researcher study the beliefs among social workers about fatherhood. The questions that were asked were designed to prompt conversation between you and the other participants in the room. Your discussion has helped the researcher analyze themes, topics and beliefs social workers hold about fathers.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Abraham Acklin or Professor Rosemary Mccaslin at (909) 537-5507. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Pfau Library at the end of Spring Quarter of 2016.
REFERENCES


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