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AREAS OF CONFLICT, COPING, AND SERVICE NEEDS AMONG CO-PARENTING PERSONS IN SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

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AREAS OF CONFLICT, COPING, AND SERVICE NEEDS AMONG
CO-PARENTING PERSONS IN SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

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

Sophia Luisa Hernandez

June 2016

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted in San Bernardino County, California. Participants completed a questionnaire regarding conflicts that arise between co-parents, levels of stress from conflicts, how parts negotiate, cooperate, collaborate and communicate and the types of coping skills that participants use when stressed. The purpose of this study was to examine conflicts between parents and caregivers who share the custody of their children with another parent or caregiver. This study also assessed coping skills and co-parenting resources that are available in San Bernardino County. Twenty-two participants completed the study, 19 were female and 3 were male. Most of the participants were Latino. Over 77% of participants reported having conflicts with the other parent or caregiver. Nearly 73% of participants reported high levels of stress when having conflicts with the other parent or caregiver. However, participants reported being able to negotiate, cooperate, collaborate and communicate appropriately with the other parent or caregiver. Participants reported that they used a variety of primitive, less primitive and mature coping mechanism when dealing with conflicts with the other parent or giver. The results also showed that few participants had engaged in co-parenting interventions that were provided in San Bernardino County.

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DEDICATION

I am dedicating this thesis to my brother Damien and my sister Erika. We've had a long journey together and survived divorce growing up. You guys are wonderful human beings and you continue to inspire me all the time. I learned so much and I'm glad that I am able to share what I've learned with you. I love you so much, Your Big Sister.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Problem Statement	1
Purpose of the Study	6
Significance of the Project for Social Work	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction	12
Conflicts between Co-Parents	13
The Need for Parental Coordination	19
Theories Guiding Conceptualization	20
The Need for Co-parenting Intervention	21
Summary	22
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	
Introduction	23
Study Design	23
Sampling	24
Data Collection and Instruments	25
Procedures	26
Protection of Human Subjects	27
Data Analysis	27
Summary	28

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Introduction.....29
Presentation of the Findings29
Summary35

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction.....36
Discussion36
Limitations42
Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and
Research43
Conclusions45

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE46

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT52

APPENDIX C: DEBRIEFING STATEMENT54

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHICS56

REFERENCES.....61

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will cover the overview of the problems that children endure when experiencing high-conflict between their divorcing parents or unmarried parents who are no longer together. Effects on the children's social, mental, emotional and physical development will also be addressed. High-conflict between these parents is characterized by legal disputes regarding custody, hostility, tension, threats, violence and using their children as tools to retaliate against the other parent. Such parents are not able to resolve conflicts or agree on reasonable custody and visitation for the children. Also covered in this chapter are the effects for children whose parents do not resolve conflicts. Social problems associated with high-conflict custody battles between the parents/caregivers will also be addressed.

Problem Statement

In most child custody cases, previously married and unmarried separated parents usually have a reasonable custody plan in place to allow both parents to be involved in the children's lives. Custody, visitations and responsibility is clarified and scheduled times are agreed to allow the children to spend time with each parent. In cases where there is high conflict between the parents, a lack of cohesion and reasonable agreements exists as to how

the parents will continue to be involved with the children's lives. Struggles for power exist because one or both parents want to have the children all the time. Such parents use legal means such as the court system and child protective services to attempt to gain sole custody of the children. Many times one or both parents aim to hurt the other parent for personal satisfaction or other motives such: to attain more child support or to pay less child support. In turn the children are being placed in the middle of the conflict and others are forced to be involved with the parents' custody battles. In the cases where parents cannot resolve conflicts or cope with their problems of separation or divorce, the children experience emotional trauma and internal stressors due to their parents' inability to cope and their refusal to work out a plan to allow both of them to be involved with the children. The children remain caught in the middle of their parent's conflict and exposure to on-going conflict is extremely damaging to the children's well-being (Kruk, 2012). When parents are constantly arguing, speaking ill of the other parent or alienating the other parent, the children will likely experience mental, emotional and medical trauma. Development in each of these areas will also be affected.

In many cases, parents' do not have the adaptive coping skills to relieve stress, resolve conflicts or communicate appropriately nor are they able to negotiate for custody. Much less they generally do not comprehend the effects that their behavior has on the children. The children experiencing high-conflict between their parents are likely to be impacted and at risk for social

and behavioral problems. Children are at risk for psychological maladjustment, including depression and anxiety, and aggression (Ayoub, Duetsch & Maraganroe, 1999).

Loyalty Conflicts, including Parental Alienation Syndrome, tend to exist during the process of conflicting parents. Loyalty conflicts occur when one or both parents pressure their children to choose side and make the children believe that the other parent is a toxic person (Thayer & Zimmerman, 2001). Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) is when a parent or both brainwash the child by using negative verbal statements to gain full control of the child's thoughts and perceptions of the other parent. The aim of P.A.S. is to erase the good memories or perceptions that the child had of the other parent. In using these tactics, the child could learn to betray and undermine the other parent (Thayer & Zimmerman, 2001). The children experience mental health trauma and display symptoms such as withdrawal from others, trouble focusing, feel unimportant, feel worried, feel guilty, and feel pressured to choose between parents. They also do poorly in school and have poor self-esteem, doubts about being loved, and may also have a distortion of reality.

According to Thayer and Zimmerman (2001), the children's development is affected. These children learn to manipulate the truth and how to lie, how to get ahead by hurting others, to blame others for their mistakes and show no fear and not to feel guilty for rejecting or hurting others (Thayer & Zimmerman, 2001). Thayer and Zimmerman (2001) state that children will

learn not to think for themselves, will need the parent or others to tell them how to feel, think, like or dislike something. Persons who develop many of these characteristics may become pathological and could place others at risk for harm during their life span.

These children could also be at risk for medical problems due to stress. If children already have medical issues the effects of stress could trigger asthma attacks, effect blood pressure or glucose levels and/or all other medical conditions. Other stress related problems include physical and somatic symptoms such as stomach aches, headaches, and fatigue. Children from high-conflict divorce and separation are also likely to smoke, have a higher use of Ritalin, be susceptible to illness, have a risk of stroke and may have an early death, (Hansen, 2013).

According Hansen (2013), children are also at risk for social problems as well. Children who grew up in these environments are also likely to get divorced or separate from their children's other parent. There is an increase chance of dropping out of school and they have a higher propensity for crime, (Hansen, 2013). These events also put society at risk for problems.

Intervention for families having high conflict is highly recommended. In such families, services should be provided at a reasonable cost to help families gain knowledge and skills needed to negotiate, communicate, understand how conflict effects the children and cope with the separation and

divorces. These parents with mutual children must learn to manage stress and be aware of their thoughts and behaviors that may affect their children.

In the County of San Bernardino, there is a large population of working class and poverty stricken parents. Many of these parents do not have resources to afford attorneys to represent them in court to attain their desired custody arrangement. Many of these parents call Child Protective Services (CPS) and make allegations against the other parent in hopes of proving that the other parent is unfit to care for the children; in turn they get full custody in court. Many of these parents do not understand that C.P.S. is solely about child safety and not child custody. Most referrals that are based on child custody are unfounded and the family is referred to counseling, legal aid and other family resources. In court, parents fighting over custody have been mandated to take co-parenting courses. However, few resources for intervention to help the parents resolve their conflicts exist in San Bernardino County. A court mediator was contacted as to where to find co-parenting resources. She stated that there are two in San Bernardino County and there are courses online via the internet. The courses were found to be given by private agencies that are very high in cost. The online courses can become costly as certain topics are covered in increments of four to sixteen hours. The problem with parents taking online course is that there is no interaction between parents. Without the interaction and practice, the parents may not gain the skills needed to negotiate and communicate.

Purpose of the Study

This study is designed to gather information from San Bernardino County community members who are parents that are divorced, never married parents, and other caregivers who share custody with a parent or caregiver who does not live with them. Due to lack of resources available for parents and caregivers who share custody, they are likely to have continued conflict and are not likely to resolve issues between them. The children are most likely to be exposed to continuous conflicts between their adult caretakers, and as described earlier, these children could be affected mentally, emotionally, biologically and socially.

The main purpose of this study is to find whether co-parents or caregivers have access to effective co-parenting resources or interventions such as co-parenting classes, education or coordination that is available to them in the local community. This study will search to find gaps in resources in the community. The study will also find what types of services parents have used to resolve custody conflicts or if custody is still an issue. Parents will be asked if they have used other community resources such as Child Protective Services, court proceedings, counseling and all others.

This study also serves to find out if parents who are involved with high custody issues have conflicts with communication, cooperation, collaboration and negotiation with the other parent or caregiver. Empirical evidence indicates that these factors are important to address for co-parenting

intervention. By addressing these factors, it can be confirmed that these factors are problematic between the parents and caregivers who are sharing children.

The third element in this study is to find out how individual parents and caregivers are coping with custody problems. Empirical evidence indicates that parents involved with high custody issues have maladaptive coping skills. Many parents react to the other parent with immature responses because they have not developed mature coping mechanisms. Interventions that teach adults how to cope have been shown to be effective to help adults resolve conflicts.

Human participants will be asked to participate in the study using survey methods. A questionnaire will be designed and given to the participants. Questions pertaining to each of the three purposes will be included and divided by four sections. The first section of the survey will include demographics such as gender, race, parental role, age, marital status and as well as other demographics. The second section of the survey will address questions pertaining to services in the community and if the participants had assistance with addressing conflicting factors such as communication, cooperation, collaboration and negotiation. The third section will ask questions pertaining to the conflicting factors and how often the conflicts with in each factors happen during a period of one week. The fourth section of the

survey will address coping skills and what coping mechanisms parents use with in conflict with the other parent.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

Commitment to service is an ethical principle under the National Association of Social Work Code of Ethics (1996). Social workers link people to services to address social problems. It is important that social workers who work with families have knowledge about the effects of divorce and separation and high conflict custody problems on children. Family social workers should also know what resources are available to the family in order to make appropriate referrals for service. In the case where services are not available when there is a need social worker must take action to make it known to the community that there is gap in services.

It is important for social workers, mental health specialists, child protective social workers, court mediators and marriage and family therapists to be aware of how the children are impacted by high-conflict divorce and separation. It is also important that these professionals be aware of the recourses that are available to address problems with co-parenting custody problems. With the necessary knowledge and understanding they will gain leverage to assess social, mental, emotional and physical well-being as well as to make referrals to appropriate treatments and interventions to help the

family cope and to develop a new homeostasis that is in the best interest of the children's well-being. It is important that social workers be aware of the type of practice that would be beneficial to address problems for high-conflict custody issues. Based on knowledge and evidence of emotional trauma, social workers and all others in the helping field can recommend treatments, develop classes/groups and attend to emotional, mental and physical needs of each individual member in the family by referring families to the appropriate treatment, exposure to continuous conflict and trauma can be reduced in the lives of children. Children's biological, emotional and social wellbeing can be improved and their chances of engagement in social problems are likely to be reduced as well.

In the County of San Bernardino, there appears to be a lack of community resources for parents who are experiencing high conflict with another parent or guardian. San Bernardino County does not have a Parental Coordinator to assess the child custody situation but uses mediators to assist the parents in negotiating a custody plan. The mediators are not mental health specialists and do not assess other areas of conflict between the parents. The mediators refer parents who have not resolved conflict to co-parenting classes. However, the County of San Bernardino does not provide a Parental Coordinator to assess and refer to specific interventions that address the individual family's need for services.

This proposed study is needed to assess the availability of resources for co-parenting in San Bernardino County. By assessing availability and or lack of available resources the community will have an opportunity to develop interventions to assist parents and caregivers who share custody of children. Assessing and confirming the types of conflicts occurring between shared parents and caregivers can help community agencies to develop and implement interventions that teach coping skills and conflict resolution that pertain to problems experienced by the conflicted parents and caregivers. Community agencies can also petition to attain funding for these interventions and can also earn money from participants in order to pay for needed materials and to hire qualified staff to conduct the intervention. The generalist intervention process can begin at engagement as there will be mandated and voluntary clients who are required or interested in participating in the intervention for the best interests of their children. At engagement, the parents will be informed of the benefits of the intervention and what the effects of custody conflict has on children. This study can be presented to the participants to show them evidence and consequences of high custody conflict between parents and caregivers.

This proposed study is relevant to child welfare practices because it is addressing the need for services that pertain to the well-being of children in San Bernardino County. By addressing the needs for parents and caregivers who share custody of children in community, the conflict between the parents

and caregivers can be reduced and the children can be positively affected by newly developed interventions. Thus the children will have a lower chance of engaging in social problems such as gang violence, teen pregnancy and other problems associated with childhood trauma from high conflict within the family.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature reviewed for this project consists of peer-reviewed articles and books written by social science professionals such as psychologists, therapists and social workers. Articles pertaining to high conflict divorce and family intervention through the process of divorce were reviewed for this study. Most of the articles address the importance of parents working together to meet the children's needs including emotional and physical health. Parental communication was also concluded to be an imperative factor in resolving conflict and negotiation. Other articles concluded that stress management is also important factor for parents going through high conflict divorces and separations. Books including handbooks/guidebooks pertaining to collaboration of divorced and unmarried separated parents were reviewed for information pertaining to the effects on children and the skills necessary for successful conflict resolution between highly conflicted parents and their children. The guide books were also used and cited for the development of the co-parenting course.

Conflicts between Co-Parents

Velez, Wolchik, Tein, and Sandler (2011) used deep breathing exercises as a mechanism for reducing stress in children. They used a theoretical framework based on social learning and cognitive behavioral methods. They created a group program to provide treatment services to mothers and children only. Children were given Cognitive Behavioral Treatment. The mothers participated in group therapy of eight to ten mothers. This study attained a sample from public records of recent divorce decrees. Most participants in the study were white middle-class Americans. The participation was voluntary. The results concluded that strengthening mother-child relationships improved coping skills.

This article did not have information regarding co-parenting but talked about stress reduction as a secondary treatment for Cognitive Behavioral Treatment. Using stress reduction techniques such as deep breathing exercises can help clients improve coping skills and a client's willingness to cooperate with treatment. Helping professionals such as social workers and therapists can add stress reduction techniques as part of treatment and course development to help clients resolve conflicts. Clients should be encouraged to practice de-stressing techniques prior to handling a matter that could lead to conflict and possibly gear clients toward better communication and cooperation. The article also implies that relationships can be strengthened which is the hope for co-parenting intervention.

Finzi-Dottan and Cohen (2012) sought to identify communication and cooperation between separated and divorced parents as predictors of successful co-parenting. This study was conducted in Israel. Socio-economic status was not a factor in the study. Communication involved speaking about the children (Finzi-Dottan&Cohen, 2012). Cooperation meant shared responsibility for childrearing tasks and treating the other parent with consideration and respect (Finzi-Dottan& Cohen, 2012). Finzi-Dottan and Cohen (2012) also considered each parent's level of defense mechanisms and optimism, child temperament (shyness) and family support as factors affecting parental communication and parental cooperation. Surveys were conducted.

Participants were referred to the study by Family Court Service in Israel. Participation was voluntary; 207 parents participated. Their study addressed parents' defense mechanisms and concluded that immature defense mechanisms impeded the ability to communicate or relate to the other parent (Finzi-Dottan&Cohen, 2012). According to the data collected, the study found that parents with higher levels of defense mechanisms indicated a tendency to negotiate and cooperate with the other parent. Those with lower levels of defense mechanisms had higher levels of parental cooperation if they had family support. Optimism was measured by scaling questions. The study indicated that women are more likely to be optimistic than men. Those with higher levels of optimism were likely to have high levels of communication. The study also found that the children's temperaments were more calm when

parents cooperated and when there were low levels of physical violence in the home. Under clinical implications, it is recommended to estimate and diagnose the emotional state of divorcees (R. Finzi-Dottan & O. Cohen, 2012). It was also implied that neurotic defenses should be considered in high conflict between parents and should be addressed with in early stages of intervention.

A study by R. Finzi-Dottan and O. Cohen (2012) did not use theoretical frameworks but provided valuable information pertaining to coping mechanisms and characteristics that contribute to high conflict divorce and custody. The information in this study can be used to develop intervention and treatment plans for individuals and family groups. The study indicates a need for intervention for families' emotional and mental needs when undergoing the trauma of divorce and separation. Social workers and therapists can also use the information to assess clients for co-parenting intervention. Per information presented in the study, coping skills should be incorporated to assist with clients who have immature defense mechanisms. Also family support could be a part of a safety plan for children and for parents who have immature defense mechanisms.

Gutzwiller (2008) reports that children score lower on psychological well-being tests when there is high-conflict between parents. Gutzwiller (2008), emphasizes a need for mandated parental coordination. Gutzwiller reviewed the article by Mitcham and Henry, (2007) and emphasizes that research is needed regarding divorcing parents and implementation of a

parental coordinator for divorcing families. Gutzwiller indicates a concern for the well-being of children and their mothers. As mothers become single parents they go through depression and are in need of intervention to help them resolve conflicts with the other parent. Gutzwiller (2008) states “Without conducting any empirical research and citing only one study (which could not be located, but according to their citation, supports the role of Parenting Coordination in reducing litigation).”

Mitcham-Smith and Henry (2007) note that the Parenting Coordinator (PC) is an amalgamation of a counselor, the courts, and a family mediator. The PC helps divorced spouses communicate, resolve conflicts, and learn new parenting techniques appropriate to the new family situation, while always remaining focused on the welfare of the children rather than on the parents themselves (Mitcham-Smith & Henry (2007)). Further, the PC helps the divorced spouses come up with and implement a parenting plan by resolving conflicts, making recommendations when the parties involved cannot agree, and ultimately by working within a court defined scope (Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007). This method of intervention seems like it could be an effective means of reducing risk to children, but has yet to be sufficiently empirically tested. Mitchem –Smith and Henry, 2007) demonstrated that a parental coordinator be a mental health clinician that assesses bio-psycho-social health in divorcing and separating families and make appropriate referrals to address

each aspect of health. Referrals were made to therapists, legal assistance and parental education and coaching.

Gutzwiller (2008) stressed a need for intervention and research for parental coordinators to be involved with divorcing parents. Intervention is in the best interest of families and it helps the children cope with separating parents, maintain consistency between parents and return to a new homeostasis as parents learn to resolve conflicts and learn to communicate and collaborate appropriately.

Mitcham-Smith and Henry (2007) explored and discussed the negative impact that divorce has on children which included the effects of judicial decisions, the negative impact of high-conflict divorce and using a parenting coordinator as a solution to the harmful effects encounter from a divorce.

Mitchem-Smith and Henry (2007) report that high-conflict divorcees are naturally hostile due to frequent parental fighting, custody battles, parental alienation, punishing the other parent, and on-going conflicts. Many of the parents communicate poorly and have little understanding of the impact that their behavior has on the children. Parents with high conflict tend to use the court system repeatedly to attempt to gain control of the situation and to condemn the other parent. Many of them spend large amounts of money to pay lawyers to prove the other parent to be unsuitable to care for the children by targeting them as being neglectful, abusive and sinister in nature.

As the proceedings are conducting during the process of divorce, the children witnessing the conflict experience emotional distress and may be impacted with psychological harm and could have long-term effects. Mitchem and Henry (2007) present that the level of intensity of the conflict is the most significant factor in the adjustment of children. They also stated that on-going legal proceedings could create a state of turmoil with the family and constant court room visits could be damaging to the children. They also mention that role identity could be impacted due to the children being caught in the middle of the conflict. The children may also experience a loyalty bind between the parents. The article also indicates that many times parents are very involved in the custody disputes that they become neglectful the children's needs and the children may become maladjusted to the situation which could result in poor school performance and mental and emotional suffering.

Also discussed in the article is that mental health factors could contribute to the high conflict in divorce. One or both parents may have mental health problems and may need intervention from professionals such as counselors and mental health professionals.

The authors state that a Parenting Coordinator (PC) is needed to intervene in high-conflict divorce cases. A PC's role is to create a parenting plan, facilitate resolving disputes, make recommendations, provide educational guidance, monitor progress, encourage positive relationships and mediate between the two parties. Mitchem and Henry (2007) stated that a PC

specifically be a mental health professional because there is a possibility of mental health being a factor in the conflict. They stated that the mental health professional will have to become knowledgeable on family law issues. The PC would not only be a counselor but an arbitrator, a coach and a mediator. The mental health professional will also have to be trained in coordination techniques and court-specific parenting procedures and coordination.

Mitchem and Henry (2007) also discuss a four-model intervention created by the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts Task Force for training parenting coordinators. Module 1 addresses guidelines and functions of the PC. Module 2 focuses on family dynamics. Module 3 focuses on the procedure and effectiveness. Module 4 addresses court specific parenting coordination procedures including legal matters.

The Need for Parental Coordination

The authors, Mitchem & Henry (2007), strongly recommend that parenting coordinators be mental health professionals for high conflict divorce and separation. They imply that as the rate of divorce increases there will be demand for PCs. They report that many counties have implemented PCs for divorces however they also report little empirical research has been done to prove the effectiveness of the strategies. The authors also report that

research on different cultures is also needed to test the effectiveness of parenting coordination.

Articles pertaining to parental coordination show that having a parental coordinator involved could be helpful in resolving custody problems with high-conflict divorce cases. By addressing the psychological and emotional traumas that each family member is enduring is essential for prevention of long term maladjustments and harmful effects to the children's health. It would also prevent the children from engaging in other maladaptive behavior such as drugs, pre-mature sex, teen pregnancy and other social problems. By having a parental coordinator would help in resolve the emotional suffering that the parents are going through as well especially if their mental health issues involved with the parents.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The theory guiding the conceptualization in this study is Systems Theory. In this study, Systems theory is used to analyze the family system of children who have two parents or caregivers who do not live together and share custody. The center of the system is the child. Both parents are in the outer boundary because share responsibility of raising the child. In the third layer of the system is the community which can include: school, church, court agencies, not for profit agencies, and other public service agencies.

This study will address interactions of communication, collaboration, cooperation and negotiation of custody between the parents because these interactions seem to be the most significant interactions that have a great impact on children. The study will also examine defense mechanisms because they also contribute to conflict between co-parent. The community (County of San Bernardino) which is on the outer layer of the system will be examined for services that provide intervention for co-parenting.

The Need for Co-parenting Intervention

From these findings high-conflict custody issues cause emotional and mental problems for children. Parents with maladaptive coping skills have trouble resolving their problems with their ex-significant other. It is found that intervention using Cognitive Behavioral methods and educational methods help the parents learn to cope, communicate and cooperate with each other more effectively and reduce the stress and the negative impacts that the divorce and separation has on their children.

The County of San Bernardino has a large population of impoverished and working class citizens. Much of the population cannot afford to have representation at the court hearings. Many parents and caregivers who share custody call bogus referrals to Child Protective Services to try and attain full custody of the children. These parents and caregivers also go to court frequently to try and attain full custody of the children. Many of these children

are traumatized by having to go to court frequently. Without co-parenting intervention, the children could continue to be exposed to trauma associated with conflict between parents. Children who are exposed will likely have trouble in school and have a high potential to engage in other problems in society.

Summary

Empirical evidence has shown that children who experience high conflict from their parents regarding custody are highly affected mentally, physically and emotionally. Empirical studies have also shown that many parents have immature defense mechanisms and lack skills to resolve conflict and negotiate reasonable visitation.

Most of the studies' samples were voluntary participants of white middle-class status. Studies regarding co-parenting among families within lower economic status were not found to support the need for co-parenting among them. Families who are below the middle class (working class and below the poverty level) are usually headed by single parent households. Many of these families lack resources to engage in services such as co-parenting classes.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methods used in this study. The study design includes the following sections: sampling methods, data collection process and procedures, protection of human subjects and data analysis. Each section will present the previously mentions and will discuss the elements pertaining to the study.

Study Design

Quantitative research methods were used in this study to find out if there are available services for co-parenting intervention in San Bernardino County, California. This study addressed significant conflict areas such as communication, collaboration, cooperation and negotiation as well as addressing the amount of conflict between parents and care-givers. The questionnaire included demographics and the knowledge of available co-parenting interventions and services in San Bernardino County. The questionnaire also addressed the level of conflicts pertaining to communication, collaboration, cooperation and negotiating between the parents. The last section will ask how the participant copes with stress.

The prediction of this study is that there is a lack of co-parenting resources in San Bernardino County. It was presumed that local community agencies are not addressing co-parenting in San Bernardino County and that there is a need for co-parenting intervention within the community. The need for the intervention is dependent upon the presumption that parents do not have access to co-parenting resources in San Bernardino County, the need for conflict resolution between parents and the need to enhance defense mechanisms. The need for co-parenting intervention is the dependent variable in this study. Independent variables in this study will be the availability of co-parenting interventions in San Bernardino County, conflicts between parents and caregiver and defense mechanisms of co-parents and caregivers.

Sampling

The sample of participants will be obtained from residents of San Bernardino County. The sample size included 22 volunteer participants. This sample included men and women, people of different ethnic groups and different socio-economic status.

A sample of participants will be gathered from random residents of San Bernardino County who shared custody with another parent or caregiver. Volunteers distributed surveys throughout San Bernardino County at places

such as work and community areas such as church and home. Fifty surveys were distributed.

In order to find out if co-parenting interventions exist within the community the researcher will verbally ask if co-parenting services are available at various agencies. Type of co-parenting intervention such as classes, support groups or family counseling that pertains only to co-parenting will also be inquired by the researcher.

Data Collection and Instruments

A survey instrument was used in this study. The survey addressed conflict between parents and caregivers who shared custody of children. The questionnaire had four parts (Appendix A). The first section addressed demographics such as gender, ethnicity, marital status, how many children they share with another parent or caregiver, what their role is as a caregiver and their income. Another question asked what type of income the parent has including child support or not. The second section asked yes or no questions regarding co-parenting services in the community and other services that parents and caregivers have used to attempt to resolve custody issues. The third part of the survey asked yes or no questions pertaining to unresolved conflict. The questions asked scaling questions in regards to how often each element of conflict arose. The fourth section of the survey asked the participant to check all that apply as to how they react to conflict with the other

parent. A list of examples of mature and immature defense mechanisms was given for the participant to check. The purpose of this section was to measure the types of defense mechanisms that the participants react with when conflict between themselves and the other parent arises.

In order to find out if particular agencies offer co-parenting interventions, some agencies throughout San Bernardino County will be contacted. The agencies to be contacted will be court mediation, non-profit organizations, outreach churches and local community agencies.

Procedures

The data was attained by gathering information from various areas of San Bernardino County. The surveys were distributed in person by volunteers who assisted the researcher to distribute the survey and the flyers. Flyers (Appendix B) were also be distributed to invite volunteers to participate in the survey. The survey was developed in April of 2015 and was ready for distribution in late June of 2015. The survey will be available until April 13, 2016. Each survey was given a number when received, starting with the number one to keep tract of the consistency of the answers. The data that was collected was coded in SPSS for analysis.

Protection of Human Subjects

Health Insurance Privacy and Portability Act guidelines was followed to protect the subjects' confidentiality of services. An informed consent (Appendix C) was presented before the first page of the survey. A debriefing statement (Appendix D) was also included after the survey questions. Each participant was informed of his/her right to confidentiality and anonymity. The data collected was placed in a manila envelope and returned to the researcher. The surveys remained with the researcher. The participants will also have access to view the results when the data has been collected and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Correlation between independent variables and the independent variable was also evaluated for significance. Frequencies of independent variables were observed and analyzed. Nominal variables such as gender and socioeconomic status was also measured and analyzed in regards to coping and conflict. Frequencies in coping and conflict were analyzed as well. The mode and means of coping and conflict were analyzed to prove that there is a need for service.

Summary

In order to identify a need for service in the community analyses of variables must be reviewed for validity to prove that the need exists. Information from the gathered surveys was analyzed. The information was coded into SPSS to measure the results. The results proved that there is a need for co-parenting intervention that includes coping skills and conflict resolution methods.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this study. A survey questionnaire was designed to address areas of Co-Parenting experienced by anonymous voluntary participants who share children with another parent or caretaker. The participants resided in San Bernardino County. The survey consisted of four sections in the survey: Demographics, Co-parenting interventions, Conflicts between Co-parents and Coping with stress. The following is a description of the results in frequencies from the questionnaire. The frequencies are represented in percentages.

Presentation of the Findings

There were a total of twenty-two participants in this study. Over Eighty-six percent were female and close to fourteen percent were male. The ages of the participants ranged from age 27 years to 83 years (Mean = 13.4). Thirty-three percent reported being between the ages of 20 and 35 years old. Sixty-seven percent reported being over the age of 35. Nine percent of the participants reported being over age sixty-five. Seventy-seven percent reported being Latino, 18% reported being White and 4.5% reported being

Black. The income type of the participants varied. More than 77% of the participants had the income type from a job. Only 4.5% received Social Security Income. Another 4.5% reported the retirement income. Over 13% reported having other unspecified income.

More than 13% of the participants reported receiving child support from the other parent or caregiver. The amount of income per month varied as well. A little over 9% reported have a monthly income amount of less than \$1250. \$1250 of monthly income is at the poverty level. Almost 41% of the participants reported had income amounts of \$1250 - \$2500. More than 22% had income amounts of \$2500 - \$3100. A little over 27% reporting monthly income amount of more than \$3100. Over 86% reported being the biological parent to the shared child(ren), 9.1% reported being a grandparent, and 4.5% reported being another relative. The average size of the household was 3.5 persons.

Over 86% reported that they shared the children with a biological parent. 4.5% reported that they shared the child with a step-parent. Approximately 4.5% reported that they shared the child(ren) with a non-relative and 4.5% reported that they shared the child(ren) with other than a relative. The average number of children shared with another was 2 children.

Participants were asked about co-parenting interventions that were sought or experienced. Over 36% of the participants reported that they had

considered learning co-parenting skills. Over 18% reported that they were mandated to take co-parenting classes by court or another agency. A little over 18% reported searching for co-parenting interventions in San Bernardino County. Participants were also asked if they were able to find co-parenting interventions in San Bernardino County. More than 13% reported that they were able to find help with co-parenting in San Bernardino County. Only 5% percent of the participants reported not being able to find assistance with co-parenting interventions in San Bernardino County. Approximately 18% reported taking computer classes because there was no in-person co-parenting help that was available in San Bernardino County. A little over 14 % reported that found affordable co-parenting in-person interventions. Exactly 40% of the participants reported that they have used public agencies such as Law Enforcement and Child Protective Services to resolve issues with the other parent. Almost 46% of the participants that reported finding informal help with co-parenting to deal with co-parenting conflicts such as church, family or friends. A little over 18% reported finding formal help with co-parenting conflicts from formal services such as counseling, community services or other agencies.

Conflicts between Co-parents

Participants were asked questions about conflicts with whom the participants shared co-parenting with. This section also addressed the level of co-parenting skills such as cooperation, negotiation, communication and collaboration.

Parents were also asked if they found dealing with conflicts or issues with the other parent to be highly-stressful without co-parenting intervention. Over 56% reported that it was sometimes stressful, and over 18% reported that it was always stressful. Exactly 25% found that they never had stress when dealing with conflict with the other parent/caregiver.

Over 68% reported that they sometimes had conflicts and over 25% reported having conflicts all the time. Slightly over 6% reported that they never had conflicts with the other parent/caregiver. Over 68% reported sometimes having arguments with the other parent/caregiver and over 18% reported that they argued all the time. Almost 13% reported that there were never arguments with the other parent/caregiver.

Over 56% of participants reported that they sometimes cooperated reasonably and fairly with the other parent/caregiver where over 25% reported that they cooperated all the time. Nearly 19% reported never cooperating with the other parent in a way that is reasonable and fair.

Over 56% reported that they are sometimes able to negotiate reasonably and fairly and over 31% reported being able to negotiate all the time. Almost 13% reported never being able to come to reasonable negotiations with the other parent/caregiver.

Almost 63% reported that they were sometimes able to communicate **only** about the children and almost 38% reported that they communicated **only** about the children all the time. Zero percent reported that they never communicated **only** about the children.

Nearly 44% reported that they were sometimes able to collaborate with the other parent/caretaker and almost 38% reported that they were able to collaborate all the time. Nearly 19% reported that they were not able to work together or collaborate with the other parent to meet the children's needs.

Coping with Stress

The participants were asked about the way they coped with stress when there is a disagreement between parents/caregivers. The participants were given five examples of immature, less primitive and mature coping mechanisms. They were to check all that applied to the way they dealt with the stress.

Of the Primitive coping mechanisms, over 63% stated that they get upset with the other parent/caregiver, and nearly 32% reported that they blame the other parent/caretaker to be the cause of the disagreement. Over 27% reported that they refused to accept the other parent/caregiver's point of view, slightly over 18% stated that they get mad, yell, throw something or hit someone, almost 5% reported that they pretend that the disagreement didn't happen

Of the less primitive defense mechanisms, nearly 41% reported that they block out feelings or thoughts about the disagreement or the way they feel about the other parent/caretaker. Nearly 32% reported that he/she looks at the other parent/caretaker's faults to justify what they said or acted the way they did. Over 22% stated that they do not think about the disagreement and focus on something else, over 13% stated that they take it out on someone else and almost 5% stated that he/she becomes nicer to the other parent/caregiver.

Of the mature defense mechanisms, slightly over 59% reported that he/she tries to control his/her emotions, thoughts, and impulses so that the disagreement doesn't get worse, over 36% reported that they think about how they would have handled the disagreement differently. Over 36% stated that they listen to what the other parent/caregiver has to say and that the participant is respectful and say his/her feelings without anger. Almost 32% reported that he/she think about positive things about the other

parent/caregiver and over 18% stated that they think about positives about themselves.

The researcher contacted Superior Court of San Bernardino and requested a list of agencies that provide co-parenting interventions. The researcher was directed to the website. There were only 17 agencies who provided co-parenting interventions for the whole county. The director of Superior Court stated that the list is available for everyone on the website and are given to parents who are petitioning or contesting custody of children.

Summary

Data from this survey was collected, inputted and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The frequencies were analyzed and compared with previous studies. The surveys were completed by volunteers who share the custody of children with another parent or caretaker.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter discusses key findings found in this study. It includes limitations, comparison to existing literature about co-parenting and implications to social work. Recommendations will also be presented for further research and practice.

Discussion

The study sample consisted of twenty-two voluntary participants who resided in San Bernardino County and who shared custody of at least one child with another parent or caregiver. Volunteers distributed the study questionnaires at various places such as work and their neighborhoods. There were two additional two surveys that were not used because the participants reported not having any children.

The participants were adults between the ages of 27 and 83. The ethnicities represented were White, Black and Latino. The participants reported being of various socio-economic status. The majority of the participants reported to be working. Most of the participants shared the child/children with the other biological parent. Only a few shared the child/children with another caregiver; a step-parent, relative or non-relative.

Co-parenting is not always easy and can be stressful between the parents or caregivers. Major findings of this study are that a significant number of participants reported that they experienced stress when dealing with conflicts with the other parent/caregivers. Nearly 94% of the participants reported that there were conflicts between the parent/caregivers. Over 77% of participants reported that it is “sometimes” stressful or “always stressful”.

Doss, Cicila, Hsueh, Morrison, and Carhart (2014) conducted a study of ninety heterosexual couples, including parents and co-parents who were transitioning into parenthood. The purpose of the study was to see if co-parenting intervention was effective to relationship functioning between parents and co-parents. This study reviewed perceived stress of each individual before and after the intervention and followed the couples for two years after the child’s birth. The participants completed surveys before the intervention, one year after the intervention and two years after the intervention. Prior to the intervention the participants reported that they had perceived having stress. Both men and women reported having stress within the first year of postpartum. However, the control group reported having more stress. After the invention, the participants who received co-parenting intervention reported having less stress two years after the intervention. Women in the intervention group reported a significant reduction in stress. The control group reported less stress but with “fewer subsequent declines.” It

appears co-parenting is stressful in general and that co-parenting intervention helps reduce stress between co-parents.

Another finding in this study was that few participants reported participating in co-parenting interventions within San Bernardino County. Over 18% had sought co-parenting interventions for assistance and about 36% considered learning co-parenting skills. Only 13.6% were able to find training that were taught in-person and 18.4% took co-parenting on the computer/internet. Only 18% reported that they were mandated to take co-parenting classes. Furthermore, only 14% reported that they were able find co-parenting that was affordable. With a society with such a high divorce and separation rate, only a few parents and caregivers are able to participate in education that could assist with co-parenting. A nation-wide survey was conducted by Pollet and Lombreglia (2008) regarding participation and satisfaction of co-parenting interventions among its participants. This study reported that barriers to the interventions were “funding and attendance.” Compared to this study, it appears that there is low participation in co-parenting intervention. There may also be an issue that prevents co-parenting interventions to be promoted in San Bernardino County.

According to one county superior court deputy director, there are co-parenting resources that could be found on the San Bernardino County Superior Court website. There are a total of 17 local resources through-out the county such as non-profits, private counselors and computer classes. The

director stated that parents are given this list when they are going through family court for child custody. I found the list difficult to find through the court website. I was only able to locate the list from the website link that the director provided on March 16, 2016.

There are many situations in which the parents have never married and therefore do not go through court for divorce and child custody. Many times non-married parents/caregivers have initiated agreements between themselves to share the children, but later have conflicts due to issues that are difficult to resolve. Another finding to this matter is that most of the participants reported working. Many times working parents/caregivers may not have the time to participate in classes, counseling, file for child custody through court as these require time to complete paperwork, visits with attorneys and such.

Almost 46% of the participants reported seeking help with co-parenting to deal with conflicts with the other parent/caregiver through informal services such as church, family or friends. This may be, as stated before, that time constraints inhibit parents/caregivers to engage in interventions or that they may not be able to afford the cost of the intervention. Only 18.2% reported using formal services such as counseling, community services or other agencies. The participants in this study were mostly Latino. Goodman and Silverstein (2002) found that Latino grandmothers who share custody have less stress than other ethnicities. It was also mentioned in their study, that

multigenerational family usually live in the household. Therefore, there seems to be more support and resources for the children and less stress on the caregiver. In general, from my observation as a social worker, Latino families in general have strong family networks and remain close to their relatives for support.

Nearly 41% of the participants reported using public agencies such as Law Enforcement, Child Protective Services and the court system. Public agencies can be convenient to parents in conflict as someone else is doing the investigating, the paper work and is confronting the other parents. As an experienced social worker, I have observed that parents use public agencies to retaliate against the other parent/caregiver.

At this time there were no available studies to compare parents using public agencies to resolve conflicts between co-parents. However, this situation was discussed with an experienced social worker at the Department of Children and Family Services (CFS). This social worker reported that referrals are received by CFS with allegations of abuse or neglect by the other parent. This social worker also reports that these referrals are received when a custody hearing is approaching (personal communication, May 2016). Many times the allegations are false or exaggerated due to one parent having a motive to gain sole custody, pay or receive more or less child support and/or to alienate the other parent from the children.

This study also found that most participants reported that they are able to cooperate, negotiate, communicate and collaborate with the other parent/caregiver. Fewer participants reported that they were never able to cooperate, negotiate, communicate or collaborate. As indicated in the study of Finzi-Dottan and Cohen (2012), these elements are important factors to address for the well-being of the children who are shared by co-parents. This study indicates that parents appear to be making efforts to make these elements work.

The findings of the study also include how the participants cope with stress. The participants were given five examples of primitive, less primitive and mature coping mechanisms. In the category primitive coping mechanisms, 63.3% reported that they get upset with the other parent or caregiver. This could be the reaction to stress that they are encountering at the time of the conflicts or long term stress due frequent conflicts. Almost 32% of the participants reported that they blame the other parent/caregiver for the cause of the argument. This could be due other issues relating as to what the conflict is about. In the category of less primitive coping mechanisms, the mechanism that was most reported was blocking out feelings about the disagreement or feelings about the other parent or caregiver. The second item that was checked the most was that they look at the faults of the other to justify their actions. In the category of mature coping mechanisms, over 51% reported that they try to control their thoughts and impulses so the conflict

doesn't get worse. The second highest item checked is Think of how I could have handled it differently, 36.4%. It is general knowledge that women seem to handle conflicts more tactfully than men. The majority of participants were women in this study.

Limitations

The sample size of this study was small and was attained by volunteers. It was difficult to attain large sample sizes from agencies such as family court, private practice therapists, and local non-profits. The request to distribute the surveys were denied. Such as small sample size would limit the generalizability of the findings. There was also no standard instrument for addressing co-parenting found at this time. The survey was developed to address the areas of concern for the study. Therefore, the reliability and validity of the instrument may be unknown.

The study did not identify what causes the conflicts. There are other factors that could be causing the conflicts and the reason the other parent/caregiver is blamed for the conflict such as drug/alcohol addiction, mental health problems, influence of family members and lack of education that inhibits the understanding of law. Once the causes of the conflicts are identified, stress from co-parenting can be further accurately assessed.

The sample also lacked diversity as the majority of the participants reported to be Latino. The majority of the participants were also women.

There may be more diverse responses to the issue of the coping mechanisms if more males had participated in the study.

Almost all of the participants were working and few had non-employment income. This could also contribute to the behaviors of the working parents but cannot be a generalization to all other co-parents. Another limitation was that culture was not taken into consideration as to how parents/caregivers resolve conflicts according to their cultural background. Culture may have an effect on how parents/caregivers relate to each other and how cooperation, communication, collaboration and negotiations are handled.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

There are co-parenting resources in San Bernardino County, but there are few co-parents who reporting to participate in the interventions. Yet a large number of co-parents/caregivers experience stress and conflicts. It would be beneficial that that co-parenting interventions be publicized and promoted in the community. As many parents who share children were not married, they may not have access or know about the resources on the court website. Thus, it is recommended that organizations such as churches, non-profits and mental health could form a partnership or collaboration to address and provide co-parenting services to the public. Services such as support groups, educational classes that provide cognitive behavioral treatment and

solution focused treatment methods to help parents be mindful of their interactions. It is also recommended that court mediation include mental health screening and intervention for high conflict cases. It is important that the court mediator be a social worker to behavioral health professional in order to be able to assess for major issues of each parent or caregiver to prevent future or long term problems that could affect the mental health and well-being of the children.

It is also recommended that child welfare social workers and law enforcement have a list of referrals for co-parenting that can be attained from the court, department of mental health or community resources to refer families who are experiencing stress and unresolved conflicts due to custody and co-parenting issues.

There can be a wide variety of research done for co-parenting issues. Qualitative studies may give more insight as to the causes of conflicts as well as an in-depth question for coping mechanisms for parents. Research using these methods could help with better assessments for evidence based practice. Outcomes for children can be assessed for high-conflict divorce by interviewing adult children affected by their parents' divorce or separation. Research on co-parenting stress and its effects on family members' functioning, mental health, and well-being is further needed. Culture should also be taken into consideration as to how the specific elements of co-

parenting are handled in a particular culture. Research about culture may also help create cultural competent interventions co-parents of other ethnicities.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to find whether co-parents or caregivers have access to effective co-parenting resources in San Bernardino County. This study also served to find out if parents/caregiver have conflicts with communication, cooperation, collaboration and negotiation with the other parent/caregiver. The third element in this study was to find out how individual parents and caregivers cope with custody problems. The study found that very few parents/caregivers engaged in co-parenting interventions and few were able find help San Bernardino County and found help with informal resources. This study indicated that participants experienced stress and conflicts with the other parent/caregiver but they appear to be trying to communicate, cooperate, collaborate and negotiate in a way that was reasonable and fair. This study also indicated that generally parents, mainly women, were using mature coping mechanisms to deal with conflicts with co-parents. To address the stress and conflicts is important that the community develop strategies and interventions to provide services to co-parenting families. Co-parenting should also be promoted with high value to invite families to engage in services and to prevent future social problems due to the affects that negative co-parenting has on society.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Co-Parenting Survey

This survey is designed to find out if parents have access to co-parenting education. There are no right or wrong answers. Your answers will remain anonymous. Please check the answer that is right for you. After you finish the survey, please return it to the researcher. Thank you.

Demographics

Check your answer below:

1. What is your Gender?
 1. Female _____
 2. Male _____

2. How old are you? _____

3. What is your Ethnicity?
 1. White _____
 2. Black _____
 3. Latino _____
 4. Asian _____
 5. Native American _____
 6. Pacific Islander _____
 7. Other _____ (specify)

4. What is your source of income? (Check all that apply)
 1. Job _____
 2. Unemployed _____
 3. Child Support _____
 4. Social Security _____
 5. SSI _____
 6. Retirement _____
 7. Other _____

5. How much income do you receive per month?
 - 1.0 - \$1250 _____
 2. \$1251 - \$2500 _____
 3. \$2501 - \$3100 _____
 4. \$3101 or more _____

6. How are you related to the children that you have custody of?
 1. Parent _____
 2. Step-Parent _____
 3. Grandparent _____
 4. Other relative _____
 5. Non-Relative _____

7. How many people live in your household? _____

8. Who do you share the children with?

1. Birth mom or dad _____
2. Step-Parent _____
3. Grandparent _____
4. Other relative _____
5. Non-Relative _____
6. Other (specify) _____

9. How many children are shared with the other parent/caregiver? _____

Co-Parenting Questions: Co-Parenting intervention includes education classes, workshops, counseling with the other parent/caregiver, and support groups that were taken **in-person** (e.g. co-parenting classes or programs) and not by a computer program.

Check Yes or No the following questions.

1. Have you considered learning co-parenting skills to help resolve conflicts with you and the other parent/caregiver may have?
 1. Yes _____
 2. No _____

2. Have you been mandated by court or other agency to take co-parenting classes, education, etc.?
 1. Yes _____
 2. No _____

3. Have you searched for co-parenting interventions in San Bernardino County?
 1. Yes _____
 2. No _____

4. If you have looked for help with co-parenting in San Bernardino County were you able to find in-person help?
 1. Yes _____
 2. No _____
 3. N/A _____

5. If you found in-person help with co-parenting in San Bernardino County, was the intervention affordable?
 1. Yes _____
 2. No _____
 3. N/A _____

6. Did you search for co-parenting interventions and not were able to find any that were convenient to you?
 1. Yes_____
 2. No_____

7. Did you have to take co-parenting classes on the computer because there was no in-person help that was available to you in San Bernardino County?
 1. Yes_____
 2. No_____
 3. N/A_____

8. Have you used resources such as Child Protective Services, Court or Law Enforcement to resolve conflicts between you and the other parent/caregiver?
 1. Yes_____
 2. No_____

9. Have you gotten help with co-parenting from church, family or friends to deal with conflicts between you and the other parent/ caregiver?
 1. Yes_____
 2. No_____

10. Have you gotten help with co-parenting from counseling, community services or other agencies?
 1. Yes_____
 2. No_____

Conflicts between Co-Parents. Check the answer to each question.

1. Do you find that dealing with conflicts or issues with the other parent/caregiver to be highly stressful without co-parenting intervention?
 1. Never_____
 2. Sometimes_____
 3. All the time_____

2. Are there conflicts between you and the other parent/caregiver?
 1. Never_____
 2. Sometimes_____
 3. All the time_____

3. How often do you get into arguments with the other parent/caregiver?
 1. Never_____
 2. Sometimes_____
 3. All the time_____

4. How often do you and the other parent cooperate in a way that is reasonable and fair?

1. Never_____
2. Sometimes_____
3. All the time_____

5. How often have you been able to come to reasonable negotiations with the other parent/caregiver?

1. Never_____
2. Sometimes_____
3. All the time_____

6. How often do you and the other parent/caregiver communicate **only** about the children?

1. Never_____
2. Sometimes_____
3. All the time _____

7. How often do you and the other parent/caregiver work together to meet the children's needs?

1. Never_____
2. Sometimes_____
3. All the time_____

Coping with Stress. Please check all that apply.

When I have a disagreement with the other parent or caregiver of my child:

____ I refuse to accept his/her point of view or I don't want to deal with it

____ I get upset with him/her

____ I get mad, yell, throw something or hit someone

____ I don't think about it and focus on something else

____ I pretend that the disagreement didn't happen

____ I blame him/her for the cause of the disagreement

____ I become very nice to him/her

___ I block out feelings or thoughts about the disagreement or the way I feel about him/her

___ I end up taking it out on someone else

___ I think about how I could have handled the disagreement differently

___ I look at the faults of him/her to justify why they said or acted the way they did

___ I think about the positive things about him/her

___ I try to control my emotions, thoughts and impulses so it doesn't get worse

___ I focus on the positive things about myself

___ I listen to what they have to say and I am respectful and say my feelings without anger

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT



California State University, San Bernardino
Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee
APPROVED 5/20/16 VOID AFTER 5/20/16
IRB# 2015-43 CHAIR [Signature]

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work

INFORMED CONSENT

This study which you are asked to participate is designed to identify interventions services that are available to parents and caregivers who share children within San Bernardino County. The researcher is a Master of Social Work student at California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee, CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to identify available co-parenting interventions in San Bernardino County and the areas of conflicts between parents/caregivers.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked questions regarding co-parenting services, interventions, and conflicts between parents/caregivers who share children.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

ANONYMITY: Your responses will remain anonymous and will be reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

BENEFITS: There will be no direct benefits to the participants.

CONTACT: If you have questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Janet Chang (909) 537-5183.

RESULTS: Please contact the Pfau Library at CSUSB after December 2016.

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

Place an X mark here

Date

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

The California State University • Bakersfield • Channel Islands • Chico • Dominguez Hills • East Bay • Fresno • Fullerton • Humboldt • Long Beach • Los Angeles
Maritime Academy • Monterey Bay • Northridge • Pomona • Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Diego • San Francisco • San Jose • San Luis Obispo • San Marcos • Sonoma • Stanislaus

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Debriefing Statement

The research study that you participated in is designed to identify interventions that are available to parents and caregivers who share children within San Bernardino County. The study is also designed to research and identify gaps in services that could be beneficial to the community of San Bernardino County in regards to helping parents and caregivers with co-parenting skills. The study will also examine the types of conflict that may arise between parents and caregivers who share children and how the conflicts are handled between the parents and caregivers.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Dr. Janet Chang at (909) 537-5501. For study results you may contact Sophia Hernandez at (***)**-**** or at coparentsurvey@verizon.net.

Thank you for your time in participating in this study. Your help in identifying available and unavailable services for co-parenting will help the community of San Bernardino know and understand the needs of parents and caregivers sharing children. Your answers will also help community organizers develop and provide services and/or interventions that attend the specific needs that arise between co-parents.

APPENDIX D
DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1. Demographics of the Participants

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	3	13.6%
Female	19	86.4%
Age		
20 – 35	7	33.3%
35 – 60	9	57.2%
Over 60	2	9.5%
Ethnicity		
Black	1	4.5%
Latino	17	77.3%
White	4	18.2%
Asian	0	0%
Other	0	0%
Income Type		
Job	17	77.3%
Social Security	1	4.5%
Retirement	1	4.5%
Other	3	13.6%
Receives Child Support	3	13.6%
Monthly Amount of Income		
\$0 -1250	2	9.1%
\$1251 - \$2500	9	40.9%
\$2501 - \$3100	5	22.7%
\$3100 or more	6	27.3%
Relationship to Child		
Parent	19	86.4%
Grandparent	2	9.1%
Non-Relative	1	4.5%
How many people live in the household?		
One	1	4.5%
Two	3	13.6%
Three	7	37.8%
Four	5	22.7%
Five	1	4.5%
Six	5	22.7%
Who the children are shared with		
Birth mom or dad	19	86.4%
Step-Parent	1	4.5%
Non-Relative	1	4.5%
Other	1	4.5%

Table 1. continued

How many children are shared?		
One	9	45%
Two	5	25%
Three	3	15%
Four	3	15%

Table 2. Co-Parenting Intervention

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Considered learning Co-Parenting Skills		
Yes	8	36.4%
No	14	63.6%
Were Mandated to take Co-Parenting Classes		
Yes	4	18.2%
No	18	81.8%
Searched for Co-Parenting Education		
Yes	4	18.2%
No	18	77.3%
Were able to find in-person Co-Parenting		
Yes	3	13.6%
No	5	22.7%
N/A	14	63.6%
Found affordable In-Person Co-Parenting		
Yes	3	14.3%
No	3	14.3%
N/A	15	71.4%
Not able to find Co-Parenting in SB County		
Yes	1	4.5%
No	19	95%
Took Computer class for Co-Parenting		
Yes	4	18.4%
No	6	27.3%
Used Public Agencies to resolve Co-Parenting Issues		
Yes	9	40.9%
No	13	59.1%
Found informal Co-Parenting Resources		
Yes	10	45.5%
No	12	54.5%
Found formal Co-Parenting Resources		
Yes	4	18.2%
No	18	81.8%

Table 3. Conflicts between Co-Parents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Stressful		
Never	4	25%
Sometimes	9	56.3%
All the time	3	18.8%
Conflicts		
Never	1	6.3%
Sometimes	11	68.8%
All the time	4	25%
Arguments		
Never	2	12.5%
Sometimes	11	38.8%
All the time	4	25%
Cooperate		
Never	3	18.8%
Sometimes	9	56.3%
All the time	4	25%
Negotiate		
Never	2	12.5%
Sometimes	9	56.3%
All the time		
Communicate		
Never	0	0%
Sometimes	10	62.5%
All the time	6	37.5%
Collaborate		
Never	3	18.8%
Sometimes	7	43.8%
All the time	6	37.5%

Table 4. Coping with Stress

Primitive Coping Mechanisms		
Refuse to accept his/her point of view	6	27.3%
Get upset with him/her	14	63.6%
Get mad, yell, throw something or hit someone	4	18.2%
Pretend the disagreement didn't happen	1	4.5%
Blame him/her for the cause of the disagreement	7	31.8%
Less Primitive Coping Mechanisms		
Don't think about it or focus on something else	5	22.7%
Become nice to him/her	1	4.5%
Block our feelings/thoughts about the disagreement or feelings of him/her	9	40.9%
Take it out on someone else	3	13.6%
Look at his/her faults to justify their actions/acted	7	38.8%
Mature Coping Mechanisms		
Think about how I could've handled it differently	8	36.4%
Think about positive things about him/her	7	31.8%
Try to control my thoughts and impulse so it doesn't get worse	13	59.1%
Focus on positive things about myself	4	18.8%
Listen to what they have to say and I am respectful and say my feelings without anger	8	36.4%

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