

6-2017

THE EFFECTS OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRATION STATUS ON FAMILY REUNIFICATION AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Mayra E. Camargo

Rocio Silva
CSUSB

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THE EFFECTS OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRATION STATUS ON FAMILY
REUNIFICATION AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

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
Mayra Elizabeth Camargo
Rocio Silva
June 2017

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Approved by:

Dr. Janet Chang, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

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ABSTRACT

Latino immigrants have a strong presence in Southern, California. Although the Latino population can be attributed with possessing significant strengths and resiliency, their unique barriers as to legal status, language, and culture, have led to the researchers' developing an interest on how undocumented immigrant status affects family reunification and service delivery within the child welfare system. The following research study focuses on evaluating how undocumented immigration status affects family reunification and service delivery in child welfare. It seeks to answer how current case work practice addresses the needs of undocumented Latino immigrant families that become involved within the child welfare system and how their undocumented immigration legal status impacts the reunification process and the receipt of services within the community. For the purpose of this study, an urban Southern California child welfare agency servicing a large population of immigrant Latinos was utilized. Using the constructivist paradigm, researchers interviewed ten children's social service workers that possessed a mixture of knowledge, experience, and insight as to this population.

The study found that undocumented Latino immigrants faced barriers related to their poor acculturation, that affected their family reunification. For instance, not understanding the English language, not understanding child abuse laws, limited access to culturally appropriate services, and social workers' limited knowledge of working with undocumented Latino immigrant clients were barriers

faced by this population. The findings in this study can be utilized by the child welfare agency to improve cultural awareness trainings for child welfare workers, work towards increasing culturally sensitive service availability, and advance policy.

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CHAPTER ONE

ASSESSMENT

Introduction

California has the highest number of Latino immigrants in the country, and this group has become a significant presence in the state's child welfare system (Dettlaff & Ryecraft, 2009). This population's specific challenges as to language, legal issues and culture, has prompted the child welfare system to make strides towards meeting this population's needs with cultural competence (Dettlaff & Ryecraft, 2009). This study seeks to observe the impact that undocumented immigrant status has on family reunification and service delivery in the child welfare system and to explore educational opportunities for increased knowledge on this population, consistency in current practices as to specific undocumented immigrant needs, and service delivery.

The constructivist paradigm and rationale for choosing the constructivist model will be presented. The constructivist model allows the gathering of data through interviews of those individuals who are closely involved in working with immigrant families. The researchers will have an active role throughout the research process and will formulate a joint construction by analyzing the data and artifacts obtained from the key stakeholders.

Further, a discussion of the existing literature on this topic is also discussed. The literary review identifies the Latino immigrant population as one afflicted by several barriers when entering CWS: ranging from language

constraints, cultural issues, immigrant status, and resource limitations that often hinder their outcomes. Also, the theoretical orientation of systems theory and acculturation is presented. Systems theory assesses the client-in-situation and the interaction between micro and macro systems as it relates to undocumented immigrant clients involved in CWS.

The potential for this study to contribute to the study of micro and or macro social work practice is also delineated, as it may benefit undocumented immigrant Latino clients and their reunification outcomes while providing a platform to improve practice and educate workers on this community's needs. The expectation is that this research will contribute a better understanding to the child welfare agencies regarding the provision of services to undocumented immigrant families and to the social work field in general. Further, although this study is centered specifically on the undocumented immigrant Latino population, the information obtained would equally benefit other immigrant populations that become involved in the child welfare system, as the information is applicable to them as well.

Research Focus and/or Question

The focus of this research is to examine the effects of undocumented immigration status on family reunification and service delivery in Child Welfare Services (CWS). This study is specifically focused on undocumented immigrant Latino clients, both parents and children, that are Court-ordered into services by

a Juvenile Court, meaning the child welfare agency has deemed a child unsafe in their parent's care, and have sought permission from the Court to maintain the family under their department's supervision.

Family Reunification services are provided to parents who have had their children removed from their care due to substantiated allegations of abuse and or neglect. Family Maintenance services are issued when a child remains in the home with their parent, however, abuse and or neglect allegations have been substantiated, but deemed mitigated by Court-ordered services and home monitoring.

When parents are Court-ordered with Family Reunification or Family Maintenance services, they are given a legal timeframe to complete such services. Services ordered by the Court for parents to complete can include: parenting classes, substance abuse treatment, counseling, anger management, and domestic violence prevention programs. If the parent is unable to complete the services within the given timeframe, CWS and the Juvenile Court have the ability to terminate Family Reunification services or in the case of Family Maintenance services order the children removed from the home. If parents do not complete services the Court and CWS will proceed with a permanent plan for the children, which can include adoption, legal guardianship or long term foster care.

Child welfare agencies attempt to provide services that are tailored to the specific needs of the families being served. Clients that become involved with

child welfare agencies are often learning the child welfare laws, while simultaneously facing the Court's intervention. Likewise, undocumented immigrant clients must also learn to navigate the child welfare process with their increased barriers related to their legal status in the country which can include language differences and eligibility to community resources. Undocumented immigrant children also face similar barriers as they have specific needs related to their legal status.

As current employees of a child welfare agency, the researchers have experience in working with undocumented Latino immigrant clients. In working with these clients the researchers have observed factors that can delay timely reunification and service delivery. Some of these factors include the parents being detained by immigration authorities, initiating Court-orders that pertain towards legalizing the children, parents avoiding contact with CWS due to fear of deportation and its governmental presence, the parent's failure to access or qualify for available resources, a parent deportation from the country, and case management practices towards reunifying children outside of the country.

Additionally, some undocumented immigrant parents may be unable to overcome their issues in a timely manner making reunification impossible. Under these circumstances the children are then left dependents of the Court until permanency can be obtained. Undocumented immigrant children lack legal standing which can impact their ability to establish their future security and independence without necessary CWS prompted procedures to legalize their

presence in this country. This study will explore the various factors that affect the reunification efforts and service delivery of undocumented immigrant clients.

Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

The researchers will approach this research study by utilizing a constructivist research paradigm. A constructivist paradigm assumes that the human reality is subjective to the individual human experience (Morris, 2014). The constructivist paradigm would be most appropriate to use for this study, as it would allow for individual points of views to be explored in order to gain a collective understanding of all the differing perspectives. A constructivist approach assumes that the way to understand a condition is to understand the perspectives of the people who are engaged in that condition (Morris, 2014). In this study, it is important to study those who are directly involved in the phenomenon being studied: the undocumented immigrant clients receiving services from CWS and the social workers who provide direct services to undocumented immigrant clients. This compilation of all the viewpoints is defined as a hermeneutic dialectic (Morris, 2014).

The constructivist approach will incorporate the researchers' expertise, but also existing literature, observations, and artifacts and is flexible as the information continues to build upon itself (Morris, 2014). The constructivist approach would also facilitate a discussion among key players to identify if undocumented immigrant clients are being adequately serviced and to explore a

joint action plan if not to formulate educational tool and assistance to meet these needs (Morris, 2014).

Literature Review

The constructivist paradigm requires that existing literature about the research question be incorporated and considered as a construction within the hermeneutic circle. Completing a literature review that addresses information such as statistics, historical information, information related to child welfare agencies in working with undocumented immigrant families, and services provided by child welfare agencies to undocumented immigrant parents plays an important role in the construction of the problem focus. An examination of various peer-reviewed articles related to Latino immigrant children, parents, and the involvement of these families in the CWS is subsequently presented. The literary material appears to support that Latino-immigrant families experience increased challenges, to include: language barriers, cultural conflicts, and service limitations.

Latino Population in the United States

Dettlaff and Rycraft, 2009, indicate Latinos comprise 15.1% of the United States total population and of these Latinos nearly 40% are foreign born immigrants (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2009). The estimated number of children in mixed-status families, where at least one parent is an immigrant, is around 9 million (Zayas, Aguilar-Gaxiola, Yoon, & Natera Rey, 2015). California is one of the states with the largest population of Mexican immigrants. According to the

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 38% of all Mexican immigrants live in California (Child Maltreatment, 2010). In 2009, 52% of all child maltreatment reports in California involved Hispanic children (Child Maltreatment, 2010). Given the rise in the increase of Latino families in the US and their increasing involvement in the CWS, it is crucial that child welfare agencies provide culturally appropriate services to these families. Particularly as children from immigrant families are often considered at increased risk of maltreatment, due to the stressors from the acculturation process experienced by the immigrant plight (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2009).

The Latino population comprises of several different countries of origin. Though these countries may share a colonial past and language foundation, they have distinct histories, including varying economic, educational, and political backgrounds (Dettlaff & Fong, 2011). Mexicans are the largest single sub-ethnic group of the entire Latino population in the US.

Child Welfare and Latino Immigrants

When conducting child welfare investigations and performing service delivery, caseworkers should be familiarized with the differing Latino cultural backgrounds and an understanding of cultural influences, thoughts, and behaviors as they conduct their assessments. Caseworkers should have an understanding of the immigrant population to be prepared to provide them with accurate services and appropriate interventions. A lack of awareness by caseworkers as to immigrant families, such as the likelihood that they are not

acculturated and therefore, lack an understanding as to the laws pertaining to CWS can be a significant barrier for accurate assessments (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2010).

In a study conducted to explore how child protection caseworkers experience the engagement process with immigrant families, it was reported that child protection workers perceived fear among immigrants and engaged in strategies with those clients in response to that fear (Kriz, Slayter, Iannicelli, & Lourie, 2012). Osterling and Han, 2011, note that child welfare professionals who work with Mexican immigrant families have “limited information on the effectiveness of their current practices on how to best direct child welfare resources” (Osterling & Han, 2011).

One researcher found that worker’s knowledge of systems of care and the Department’s resources and their willingness to help families played a role in families’ process of accessing services (Ayon, 2009). Ayon 2009, notes that undocumented families or mixed documentation status families may not request the services needed due to fear of deportation or fear of losing their children and it is important that child welfare workers engage these families. The researcher recommends that child welfare workers who carry a non-English caseload and who assist undocumented families should carry a smaller case load as these families require more assistance and time (Ayon, 2009).

Dettlaff and Rycraft, (2010), note that a practice framework that is culturally competent, community-based, and includes family-focused strategies

can facilitate positive outcomes for Latino families. This framework stresses the importance of exploring caregiver strengths and to understand the family's view of the problem to develop a service plan that is "culturally responsive" (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2010).

Latino families and people of color are overrepresented in clients of CWS and there is a disparity of treatment modules and services provided to these families (Ayon, Eisenberg, & Erera, 2010). There is often a language barrier in these cases, which can severely impact the ability of these families to participate in the intervention process as they lack assistance in understanding the demands of CWS (Ayon, Eisenberg, & Erera, 2010). The high caseloads limit the individual attention necessary to thoroughly explain the process to Spanish-speaking clients. Also, they may not be assigned Spanish-speaking caseworkers if these are not available.

Protective Factors Among Latino Immigrants

Although immigrant families and their children present a unique set of risk factors, given the supplementary stressors that come with adapting to a new country, they have significantly fewer risks in comparison to families of US-born parents. The differences in protective factors from the first and second-generation Latino children, attribute to an understanding that generational statuses among immigrant families relate to increased odds of them becoming involved with CWS (Osterling & Han, 2011). Most immigrant children that become involved in CWS do so through traditional means. Hence, their

involvement precedes the investigation of maltreatment or neglect with substantiated findings (Earner, 2007). That being said, research does correlate sexual abuse to be more likely experienced by children born outside the US, children with at least one foreign-born parent are also significantly more likely to be reported as victims of sexual abuse (Osterling & Han, 2011).

Caseworkers should be aware and familiarized with the potential protective factors often found in immigrant families, including the increased likelihood of a two-parent household, a stable primary caregiver, and a safe community environment (Dettlaff, Earner, & Phillips, 2009). First-generation Latino immigrant parents are also less likely to use drugs, have criminal arrest histories or possess poor parenting abilities (Dettlaff, Earner, & Phillips, 2009). Per existing research, second-generation Latino children are more at risk of child welfare involvement than first-generation Latino immigrant children (Osterling & Han, 2011).

CWS was created with the pervasive white standard in mind, and is expected to measure, assess and evaluate even nonwhite populations (Dettlaff & Fong, 2011). However, as the Latino population has grown, a focus on culturally appropriate practices has increased. Evaluation models have been urged to focus on culturally appropriate services (Dettlaff & Fong, 2011). There is a need to remain culturally competent, yet still ensure the outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being of children (Dettlaff & Fong, 2011). Latino families are often distrustful of institutionalized settings, often due to their unfamiliarity

and undocumented status. They may not trust service providers, and are impacted by their experiences as an ethnic minority (Ayon, 2009). Further, they may encounter services that are culturally stigmatized such as receiving counseling services (Ayon, 2009).

With the rapid growth of this immigrant population in the US, it is necessary for the complexity of issues they face to be understood (Dettlaff & Fong, 2011). Once involved in the CWS, Latino families face challenges that include a lack of access to service in their preferred language (Earner, 2007). Language barriers can result in miscommunications and misunderstandings that can negatively impact a family's progress (Earner, 2007). Further, language delays hinder service delivery and affect the ability of parents to complete all services requested. This increases the risk of parents facing termination of parental rights, if time frames according to the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997, are not met (Earner, 2007)

Also, many undocumented immigrant parents who become involved with child welfare services are often arrested and subsequently transferred to immigration authorities. Many of these parents also face the risk of being deported to their country of origin. It is estimated that 90,000 parents of U.S. Citizens are deported each year (Thronson, 2013). California recently adopted the "Reuniting Immigrant Families Act", which authorizes more time for child welfare agencies to find and reunite detained and deported parents with their children or find placement with relatives, regardless of their immigration status

(Thronson, 2013). Although many children reunite with their parents in the parent's country of origin, many are left behind in the US. In addition, it is estimated that as many as 5100 children were in foster care and whose parents have been deported or detained (Thronson, 2013). As Thronson notes, "when children of immigrant families are involved with child welfare systems, issues as central as seeking placements for children can create struggles as child welfare workers and courts grapple with the difficulties, both practical and legal, that arise in the vetting of possible transnational placements, potential placements with undocumented caregivers, and resource limitations related to immigration status that impact reunification planning" (Thronson, 2013).

The literature review provides a lens of the factors that are often faced by immigrant families receiving adjudicated services from CWS. The issues identified have also been observed in clients receiving family services in the CWS agency of interest for this study. Currently, the proposed study site provides several services towards the undocumented Latino immigrant population, for instance, it contracts with service providers that offer Spanish-speaking educational programs, such as parenting education, anger management, and counseling services. The study site also employs bilingual caseworkers that are often assigned to Spanish-speaking clients. Additionally, a specialized unit acts as a liaison between the child welfare agency and foreign consulates when immigrant clients are involved. This unit helps obtain legal documents such as foreign birth and death certificates, communicates with

foreign social service departments to help coordinate service delivery to parents residing out of the country, assists with international parent-child visitation, such as at the Mexican border, and processes Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) applications on behalf of undocumented dependent children to assist them in obtaining legal residency within the United States. This specialized unit has also been approved to certify documentation for U-Visas, which are intended for victims of crimes and their direct family members.

Although services for undocumented immigrant clients are available, the knowledge of their availability is not widely known. Caseworkers who rarely work with undocumented immigrant clients are less likely to be aware of the services and procedures for undocumented clients. Therefore, it is important that the effects of undocumented immigration status on family reunification and service delivery be known and discussed among key players to improve the outcomes for this population.

Theoretical Orientation

This research study focuses on the effects of undocumented immigration status on family reunification in families involved in CWS. The most appropriate theoretical framework to be utilized in this study is Systems Theory. Systems theory assesses the client-in situation. Utilizing systems theory as a framework, the researchers will assess not only the problems of the client, but also assess the various systems that affect the client. Systems theory will allow the researchers to identify the systems that the undocumented immigrant parents are

a part of in order to be able to better understand their circumstances and needs. In applying systems theory to this research, it is important to recognize the importance of culture, acculturation and traditional values.

Within the framework of systems theory, acculturation theories play an important role and directly relates to the experience of Latino immigrants in the United States. Acculturation refers to the changes that occur from the maintained contact between two different cultures (Berry, Trimble, & Olmedo, 1986). As noted by Johnson, 2007, "Placing theories of acculturation within an ecological framework highlights the ways in which the interplay of factors at the micro, exo and macro levels may interact to influence important aspects of child and family well-being among children of immigrants and their families" (Johnson, 2007). Depending on the level of acculturation, parents can have distinct experiences when interacting with a government entity such as a child welfare agency.

As such, in this research study the identified systems to be assessed are the individual, the family system and the interaction between these with macro systems such as the child welfare agencies and immigration authorities.

Contribution of Study to Micro and/or Macro Social Work Practice

This study has the potential to contribute to social work practice at both the micro and macro levels, by serving as a platform for changes in policy and practice when working with undocumented immigrant clients. The investigation of services rendered to undocumented Latino immigrant clients within child welfare

agencies can significantly benefit this population by improving caseworker practice. If the combined constructions derived from the data gathered, determine that the services that exist for this population are inconsistently utilized or not known to all caseworkers and supervisors, it would help garner attention for the need to better distribute this information. It would also provide an opportunity for discussion on how to ensure the specific needs of this population are consistently addressed throughout the agency, which could potentially improve the options and quality of services for immigrant families and positively affect undocumented immigrant Latino clients by improving their service experience. It can also help streamline service practices, such as the early initiation of immigrant relief options including SIJS and U Visas, which are tools available to assist CWS clients in obtaining legal standing in this country.

The research findings can be utilized to improve the services provided to undocumented immigrant families and aid in increasing safe, family reunification within this demographic.

Summary

The proposed research question, the effects of undocumented immigration status on family services and service delivery in CWS, was introduced, as was the planned constructivist research paradigm. The constructivist paradigm will allow the construction of a hermeneutic dialectic, which will include the researcher's' expertise on the matter, a literature review, and interviews with key informants. A systems theory perspective will be utilized

in this study to describe how the various systems interact with one another and have a direct impact on the problem being studied.

The literature review presented information pertaining to the Latino immigrant population involved in the child welfare system, including the barriers affecting this group, such as language and cultural implications. Moreover, the potential for this study to contribute to the study of micro and or macro social work practice was discussed, identifying how it can bring attention to this population and generate positive changes to benefit their outcomes in CWS.

CHAPTER TWO

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Engagement is an essential element in the constructivist research, as this paradigm demands in-person contact, including building rapport with those identified as interest players, in-person interviews to obtain data, and ongoing check-in meetings with the group participants. This section introduces the study site, a child welfare agency in the Inland Empire in Southern California, and describes engagement strategies with gatekeepers and key participants within this organization. The researchers' self-preparation methods are discussed, such as, how to identify study participants and plans for negotiation with gatekeepers. In addition, the researchers discuss the importance of anticipating any possible issues that may arise throughout the study, such as awareness of personal biases and the participant's environment. The introduction of diversity issues, ethical issues, and political issues are also included, for instance, undocumented Latino immigrant related issues. Lastly, engagement strategies with the incorporation of modern media use is presented, such as the use of various technological means of communication, including, emails, video-conferences, and digital presentations.

Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

The gatekeepers of this agency are the institutional leaders of the organization, such as the Assistant Director, Regional Managers, and supervisors. The researchers utilized various engagement strategies for gatekeepers at the research site. Since the researchers are currently employed at this agency as child welfare workers, there are established relationships between key participants and gatekeepers including with other child welfare workers, supervisors and regional managers. The researchers engaged the trusted gatekeepers by discussing the problem being studied, respecting their varying perspectives on the issue, and drawing out their thoughts on the project to learn about their concerns (Morris, 2014). In addition, the researchers provided them with a copy of the research proposal to get approval to conduct the research at this agency.

In order to convince the gatekeepers to allow this study to take place at this agency, the researchers discussed experiences, issues or concerns with the project (Morris, 2014). Further, the researchers proposed a partnership with the study site to collaboratively identify the strengths and areas for improvement of current practice as to the undocumented Latino immigrant population, to establish a collective plan of action that can ultimately improve the services provided to these clients and lead to improve reunification and service delivery outcomes among this population. Another strategy utilized was “snowball sampling”, where the researchers requested information from the gatekeepers

with whom a relationship has been established about other possible key informants who may have valuable information regarding the focus of the study.

Once the key participants and gatekeepers were identified, it was important to establish terms regarding the study such as the process, timeframe, contacts required, and confidentiality.

Self-Preparation

The researchers had to plan for issues or situations that could arise throughout the research study. For example, differing constructions were anticipated amongst the varying viewpoints of the caseworkers.

Further, as a means of self-preparation, the researchers had to become comfortable with the continuous engagement requirements with the study site and participants. Therefore, self-preparation, towards managing their study relations is important, such as becoming familiar with the agencies culture, using professional language, maintaining punctuality, and accountability. Further, it was important for the researchers to develop a thorough understanding of the family reunification services and practices focused on addressing the needs of the immigrant families, and varying viewpoints of this population. The researchers had to be aware of their personal biases and gain an awareness of the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that social workers have of the current services available to undocumented Latino immigrant families.

Moreover, the researchers had to plan effectively for time constraints that may be encountered when completing this study. This included preparing for

time required to engage the gatekeepers and stakeholders and to complete the interviews. One way in which the researchers prepared was by developing a question guide that included open and close-ended questions to obtain necessary information.

Diversity Issues

The focus of this research study is on the effects of Latino undocumented immigration status on family reunification and service delivery in child welfare; therefore, diversity considerations in this study were strongly focused on the undocumented immigrant clients being researched. The topic of undocumented immigration is a sensitive topic that can cause apprehension, as varying opinions regarding the undocumented immigrant population exist, ranging from concerns that they are in the country illegally, are an added strain on the economy and are privy to subsidies that would benefit actual citizens. Given the polemic as to immigration, the researchers had to have a thorough understanding of the differing Latino cultures and the barriers that they face.

The key participants and stakeholders that comprised the hermeneutic circle stemmed from various cultural and economic backgrounds. They had differences in perspectives and personal histories. These varying backgrounds influence individual constructions as to the undocumented immigrant population.

The researchers had to be self-aware of their own biases and acknowledge that these may have an effect on their construction of the study focus. There is a need to develop sensitivity to the culture while being aware of

personal, cultural lenses (Morris, 2014). Researchers should acknowledge, honor, and respect the unique identities of the study participants and promote this throughout the research process. Even when a culture between the researcher and researched is seemingly shared, there are unique experiences and understanding that need to be derived directly from the individual and not assumed. It is essential for assumptions not to influence the interpretation process (Morris, 2014).

Ethical Issues

Research has ethical constraints, which researchers must be wary of not crossing, as it can lead to abuse of power and harm to the study participants. Based on the NASW code of ethics, social workers that participate in research must assess the consequences that research can have on participants, and obtain voluntarily or written informed consent when appropriate. To evaluate the ethical considerations of this research project, including the potential for harm, it underwent a Human Subject Review managed by the California State University of San Bernardino, Institutional Review Board (IRB), that evaluated it using federal guidelines (Morris, 2014). However, as Morris (2014) notes, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity is challenging due to the nature of the constructivist research method of openness, including in-person interviews and group check-ins.

Due to the nature of this constructivist study, it is the insurance of the participants' confidentiality and anonymity was an ongoing concern. As the study

site is a child welfare agency office, it naturally forms a relatively small circle, where the protection of privacy and confidentiality of participants can be easily jeopardized. While attempts to protect confidentiality were planned, such as omitting personal and identifying information this may not be sufficient to protect all identities. This risk was made clear to the participants, within the informed consent and throughout the progress of the study.

As anonymity was a concern when gathering constructions and continuing the interaction between the main players, some participants may not feel comfortable remaining as part of the study, therefore, the researchers maintained flexibility to accommodate changes in the study, as participants may choose to withdraw at any time (Morris, 2014). Though this lack of participation did not affect the research, it will need to be noted in the study (Morris, inpress).

Finally, the researchers ensured that the study participants were made fully aware of the nature of the study, by having each participant sign a written informed consent, before any collection of data began (Morris, 2014). The written informed consent included the following information: a brief description of the study, an introduction of the researchers, an explanation of how the project relates to the researcher's academic program, a description of the procedures that will be followed during the collection of data, the risks, and benefits of the study, an explanation of confidentiality and legal constraints, as well as how the data will be implemented (Morris, 2006).

Political Issues

Before beginning a constructivist study, the politics are negotiated, with an understanding that power will be shared, honesty kept, and a commitment by the participants made (Morris, 2014). In the context of a constructivist study, it is assumed that the shared constructions will develop a joint construction to include areas of consensus and differences between stakeholders, with an ultimate collective plan for action to improve the needs identified collaboratively by the hermeneutic circle (Morris, 2006). As this research study focuses on undocumented immigration status as related to child welfare services, there are political issues that may emerge.

While on a social service level, providing clients with a high degree of appropriate services regardless of their ethnic background is prioritized, some study participants may feel uncomfortable or resentful of the focus of services to this population. Undocumented immigration is a current mainstream political issue. There is a growing anti-immigrant sector, more recently popularized by the current president of the United States, Donald Trump, that controversially labeled undocumented immigrants as criminals and rapists, fueling anti-immigrant attitudes (Johnson, 2015). This emerging stance has created further distrust from the Latino population as to governmental agencies like the child welfare system.

There may also be reluctance from the Child Welfare agency to provide access to information regarding the provision of services or interventions for

immigrant families without a clear understanding of the purpose of the study which is intended to assist in promoting knowledge and improved practice implementation for immigrant clients. Without this dialogue, there would be concern that the research findings are not geared towards aiding the agency, but towards a negative portrayal, which would not be supportive of the agency's relationship with the community.

To further add to the political issues, it is important to recognize that when children of undocumented immigrant parents are removed from their care they are not only involved with the child welfare agency but the juvenile justice system as well. This creates an even greater political issue between the Child Welfare Agency and the Juvenile Court. When immigrant parents are deported and their children remain in the United States, under the care of child welfare services, it is up to the Court and the Child Welfare agency to determine if returning the children to their parent's country of origin is in their best interest. When parents are deported or their whereabouts are unknown, child welfare agencies must engage in efforts to try to locate these parents, however, the results of these attempts are often poor and unavailable, which can result in children not being able to reunify with their parents and consequently having the parental rights terminated and adopted (Jackson, 2011).

The Role of Technology in Engagement

The constructivist paradigm calls for ongoing interactions with participants, which can be very time-consuming and difficult to organize. Therefore, the use of

technology is an important aspect of conducting research for this study. As discussed in Morris (2006), technology is any mechanical enhancement, implemented to assist at any stage during the research process, whether simple or complex (Morris, 2006). For instance, the use of the Internet to complete an analysis of the existing literature on the subject matter or a telephone call to schedule an interview with a participant. The use of technology in this research assisted in saving time for the researchers and participants alike. Although face-to-face interviews were preferred, technology can be incorporated to facilitate the check-in process. Once rapport exists with the study participants and gatekeepers, secure e-mails will be an appropriate and readily available means of communication with the group. Additionally, virtual meetings can be organized; that will work with the researchers and study participant schedules. Also, digital presentations via secure emails can assist in updating constructions for the group.

Summary

This concludes the introduction to the engagement section of the research proposal. This section described the study site, a child welfare agency in Southern California's Inland Empire, as well as the strategies for engagement with gatekeepers and key participants within this organization. Additionally, the researchers discussed key aspects of self-preparation within the researcher position and the importance of engaging in self-preparation in order to ensure that the study remains authentic and professional. Finally, diversity issues,

ethical issues, political issues and the role of technology and the importance of their consideration in the engagement phase of the study were addressed.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

The proposed research study focuses on the effects of undocumented immigration status on family reunification in child welfare services. The following sections discuss the implementation of this research focus, using the constructivist paradigm. It introduces the data-gathering process, which occurred primarily via in-person interviews. The research study took place at a child welfare agency in Southern California that serves this client group and the study participants include stakeholders that work directly with the undocumented Latino immigrant population, such as child welfare caseworkers. The researchers' means of selecting the participants through purposive and snowball sampling methods are discussed. Further, the method of data gathering is presented, as well as the varying phases of data collection, data recording, and the analysis of the gathered data. The findings and the dissemination plan is also addressed, which consists of a final report.

Research Site

The research study site is a Child Welfare agency located in Southern California, within the Inland Empire. This agency is governmentally owned and funded. As a Children Protection Service (CPS) agency, it is entrusted to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of children within its boundaries. This

agency of the study site has a substantial Latino population, where 47.4% of this region is of Latino descent ("County Report QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau," n.d.). Further, the percentage for Latino children in the population is 62.39% ("County Report QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau," n.d.). The role of this agency within the community is to investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect, provide resources within the community, and offer case management when Court intervention is necessitated to ensure the safety of children. According to figures obtained from the California Child Welfare Indicators Project, the percentage for substantiated child abuse allegations within Latinos is 56.68, and the number of Latino children in care in 2014 was 54.38 % ("CWS/CMS Dynamic Report System Disparity Indices," n.d.)

When families come to the attention of this child welfare agency, they are provided with resources that are designed to mitigate the issues that brought them before the attention of this agency. The agency then works in collaboration with community-based agencies and organizations to provide various educational and treatment based programs, including substance abuse, mental health services, parenting education, anger management, and domestic violence classes. These programs, referred to as services, are often included in a family case plan, which is Court-ordered and intended to mitigate safety and risk concerns identified within the families.

Study Participants

Selected study participants comprised the hermeneutic circle. The most appropriate participants for this study are those who work directly with this population. Thus, the study participants were current child welfare caseworkers and supervisors employed at the study site that service the undocumented immigrant population involved in child welfare services.

Child welfare workers investigate allegations of child abuse. For the most part, if the allegations are substantiated, the children are either removed from the care of the parents or remain in their parent's care under Court jurisdiction. When children are detained from their parents' care, the Court often provides the parents with family reunification services. Once the Court takes jurisdiction, the case is assigned to a caseworker, who oversees the case until the children return to the parent's care, or in the event that they cannot return to their care, until permanency is achieved. The number of child welfare caseworkers who participated in this study was ten.

Selection of Participants

The selection of study participants is an important component of a constructivist study. A better-rounded hermeneutic dialectic circle is achieved by a maximum variation of sampling to ensure a diversity of experiences (Morris, 2015). To select study participants, key stakeholders were identified by obtaining feedback from gatekeepers. This is also referred to as, "snowball or chain sampling," and can assist in gathering potential key participants. This occurs

when stakeholders nominate or suggest other participants that may be beneficial to the study. Purposive sampling was implemented as it is based on a particular characteristic of the population, in this case child welfare caseworkers and supervisors.

Participants included child welfare caseworkers from the child welfare agency study site, particularly those that provide ongoing services to families that are under adjudicated cases. These stakeholders have direct interaction with CWS, including clients and are responsible for helping them with making progress and providing them with service delivery by engaging them in case planning activities. The child welfare caseworkers are important stakeholders due to their experience in working with undocumented Latino immigrant clients. Their constructions are important as they help identify the availability of adequate services for undocumented immigrant clients and any barriers to obtaining these services based on the immigration status of the client or family. Their experiences and perspectives regarding the reunification and service delivery process contributed to the joint construction and hermeneutic dialectic circle significantly.

Data Gathering

Qualitative data for this study was collected through interviews with the key stakeholders. The researchers prepared for the interviews with the study participants by completing a set of guideline questions which helped focus on the research question and identify important facts related to the study.

As the constructivist paradigm was utilized, it is important to bear in mind that the researcher's individual constructs were included in the research, in addition to them serving as interviewing instruments. Theoretically, the ideal constructivist research approach would consist of a researcher conducting an interview with a blank sheet of paper and without a list of prepared questions (Morris, 2014). Thus creating a fluid-interviewing environment without any preconceptions or assumptions; however, given that this strategy would likely create confusion and be an obstacle in conducting time effective interviews, it is recommended that at least some general questions be established beforehand (Morris, 2014).

Questions that were included as part of the interviews with key players will included Experience/Behavior Questions such as: What is your experience in working with undocumented Latino immigrant children and parents? Opinion/Values Questions such as: How familiar are you with the process of reunifying children with parents who have been deported? Feeling Questions such as: How do you feel about the services provided to immigrant and undocumented clients? Knowledge Questions such as: What is your understanding of the policies related to providing services to undocumented immigrant families, including those related to immigrant children and providing reunification services to immigrant/deported parents? Sensory Questions, such as: When you have worked with immigrant parents/children what have you

observed? and Background/Demographic questions, such as: What is your ethnic background, age, gender? (Morris, 2014).

The researchers respectfully considered the study participant's schedules to conform the time and place of the interview. The protocol for conducting the interviews was structured by the researcher's utilization of an outline with key questions created to focus on obtaining primary information as to the interviewees experience and knowledge on the target population, in addition to seeking out any specific areas of need. The initial questions were utilized to build rapport and to set the tone for the interview. As the interview proceeded, more specific questions were presented to ensure that all important topics were addressed. The researchers helped guide the interview by asking for clarification or by requesting more information. In the termination stage of the interview, the researchers summarized what was discussed giving the study participant the opportunity to clarify or add any additional information.

The individual constructions collected from the interviews will be compiled and then shared with the group of participants that comprise the hermeneutic circle. Participants will be able to continue to develop their own constructions based on the group construction and contribute further to the joint construction.

Phases of Data Collection

The initial task for the researchers was to gain permission at the research site and engage with the key stakeholders, as this will initiate the data collection process (Morris, 2014). The researchers were then able to identify key players,

such as those familiar with working with undocumented immigrant families or that have influence with other prospective participants. The researchers collected as much data as possible to develop the construction of everyone to present it within a joint construction. A series of prepared open and close ended questions facilitated the acquisition of information during the data collection process.

Throughout the process of data collection, the researchers acted as an instrument of the study. The researchers provided the participants a background of the study. Additionally, they were provided with specific information about what to expect such as how much time the interviews will last, whether there will be a need for follow-up contact, and discussed the need for future meetings, and most importantly, provided them with formal informed consents. The study participants were asked for permission to have the interviews recorded as this would provide the most factual account of the data gathered.

Each study participant was interviewed individually to allow the participants to build their own construction. The researchers had an active role in this process as their construction of the research topic was shared with the interviewee. The interview began with engagement questions such as: How long have you worked in child welfare? What do you like most about working in child welfare? After these questions, the actual topic questions were introduced. Finally, termination questions such as, Do you have any questions or concerns regarding the issues that we discussed? and, Do you know of someone else who

may be interested in talking to us about this topic?, were presented to the participants.

Once the interviews were completed, the researchers transcribed the recordings, summarized the main points and corroborated the individual constructions with the study participants to ensure the researchers had an accurate understanding of their individual constructs. This data was then organized into a joint construction that will be shared with all members of the hermeneutic circle at a member checking meeting. The group will then need to agree on the joint construction, in addition to the action plan if any is needed. For instance, if it were to be determined that the study site lacks services or knowledge on the tools available to aid service delivery among undocumented Latino immigrant clients, a plan may be initiated to correct the problem. For instance, key players may propose that a greater number of providers that provide services to Latino undocumented immigrant clients be contracted or desire to exert their influences to improve knowledge and interest in this population.

A way of determining the accuracy of the analysis in a constructivist perspective is by engaging the level of agreement among group members in the hermeneutic dialectic circle (Morris, 2014). The greater the level of agreement among group members as to the group construction, will more accurately represent the member's points of view as to this population.

The information derived from the individual constructions can always be built upon or expanded, as the constructivist paradigm, provides an opportunity for participants to change their constructions as they review new constructions from other participants (Morris, 2014). For the purpose of this study, in person check meetings would likely lead to many schedule conflicts, giving the busy and unpredictable schedules of child caseworkers and other key participants. Therefore, (member check-ins) group check meetings via secure emails, which can include updated information on the joint construction, may prove more efficient. By using secured-emails as a means of communication, caseworkers and other key participants can then review the developing constructions when they are free to do so and provide feedback accordingly.

Data Recording

The data that was collected from the interviews is qualitative data. As the constructivist paradigm relies heavily on interviews, notes and audio recordings were the preferred method for transcribing data. The researchers discussed with each study participant the purpose and need to record the interview and the study participants were asked their permission to have the interviews recorded. All participants were willing to have the interview recorded. After the interviews were completed, the participants were asked for additional names of key players to obtain other perspectives.

Further, the responses obtained from the individual during the interview were summarized for that person to confirm that their construction was

accurately represented. Each interview followed the same method, and then each construction was shared during individual interviews.

A joint construction was subsequently built, which included the constructions of the gatekeeper's, key players, researchers, available literature, and any other sources that were observed or documented (Morris, 2014). The hermeneutic circle was made aware of the varying constructions, including the construction developed from the researchers' journals in the literary review.

Data Analysis Procedures

Once the interviews were completed, the data was analyzed and introduced in a joint construction to the hermeneutic dialectic circle. The researchers organized the data collected and analyzed it. In a constructivist research approach, the collection of data and analysis of this data is ongoing and builds from the other. For example, after interviewing a participant, the researchers analyzed their construction and compared it to the other participants' constructions. In a constructivist study, the evaluation of the study will consist of a qualitative analysis of the data. As the data in a constructivist approach is qualitative, it is meant to provide a greater understanding of the problem and not necessarily to answer a question. As suggested by Morris, 2014, it is important to complete an analysis of the data as quickly as possible after the interviews, observations, or after review of available documents (Morris, 2014). In this stage of the research process, the researchers took part in both collecting additional data through interviews and analyzing the data gathered.

The researchers gathered, analyzed, recorded, grouped, organized, and found relationships between categories. The researchers proceeded by sharing the joint constructions obtained from the data through a member check meeting with members of the hermeneutic dialectic circle.

The data gathered from the interviews was deciphered and transformed. To carry out this process the information was broken down into units of information. A unit is defined as the smallest piece of information that can be understood on its own and must be relevant to the research (Morris, 2014). The units of information were grouped based on their similarities. Through this process, the researchers continued to analyze the data and constructions began to arise. Once the units were grouped, each of the categories was given a name.

Once this data was organized, relationships between the categories were looked at to develop a better and more defined joint construction and to determine whether the relationships allowed the researchers to build on the relationships and use them as a reference for further questions. This approach helped give a more concise picture of the factors associated with undocumented immigrant families at the study site that are receiving family reunification services.

Summary

The participants of this research study included ten social workers from the child welfare agency study site in Southern California. The participants were identified through purposive and snowball sampling. The researchers gathered

qualitative data through interviews with the participating key stakeholders. The researchers organized and analyzed the data gathered and reported back the findings of the study to the participants through member check meetings to develop the ongoing joint construction among the hermeneutic circle.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION

Introduction

The preceding chapter presents a report of the study and its findings. The narrative contains a description of the participant's demographic information, their responses to various questions, and the categorization of these questions as they relate to the topic.

A discussion has been included with the principal findings found in the data analysis of this study. These results are further explained in greater depth in connection with existing literature and other outcomes generated by previous studies.

Data Analysis

The study participants consisted of ten children's social services workers. The participants were sampled from one of the eleven regions that form the identified child welfare agency. The study participants were of diverse backgrounds and mixed experiences. Four of the study participants were male, and six were female. Two of the participants identified themselves as Mexican, one as Mexican-American, one as Asian-American, two as Hispanic/Latino, one as Nigerian, one as Black, one as Middle Eastern and one as White/Caucasian. The ages of the participants ranged between 26 and 54 years of age. The amount of time the participants stated they had worked with the child

welfare agency ranged from one year to 22 years. Two participants had been employed with the agency one year, one participant two years, one three years, one four years, one nine years, one ten years, one 11 years, one 17 years, and one 22 years. Four of the study participants held positions in Investigative Services units, and seven held positions in Continuing Services units.

When participants were asked what they liked most about working in this child welfare agency, 80% reported enjoying the interactions they had with children and families; 10% reported the current small caseloads, and 10% reported liking “everything” (Participant #10, personal communication, April 10, 2017).

Participants provided varied responses when asked about their experiences working with undocumented Latino immigrants clients. 40% of the participants indicated they had found undocumented clients had increased difficulties in accessing services due to their status, as they were rendered ineligible for some community services, in addition to there being a lack of Spanish-speaking providers, and therefore, longer wait times to enroll in Court-ordered services.

Another 20% of the participants reported they had experienced undocumented immigrant clients were afraid of governmental agencies and often hesitant to disclose information related to their legal status due to fear of deportation. Another 10% indicated they had limited experience working with undocumented clients but reported that when working with Spanish-speaking

families, the children appeared more assimilated to the American culture than their parents. Another 10% responded that in their experience with undocumented Latino immigrants, the service provision offered to the family was tailored to meet their needs. 10% reported undocumented Latino immigrant families were cooperative when the worker could relate to them and speak to them in their language. 10% said they had experienced that the extended family members were often very involved and willing to help. However, they also tended to protect the parents and by doing so did not keep the children's interest as their main priority.

The participants were questioned if they felt confident working with undocumented immigrant Latino clients and 90% reported that they did. Only 10% reported not feeling confident and indicated it was because they did not speak the Spanish language. One participant voiced a desire to have more cases with this population assigned to their caseload.

The participants were also asked if they had any reservations working with this population, 90% reported not having any reservations, and 10% acknowledged having some reservations. The participant who reported having reservations indicated these reservations stemmed from not being familiar with this population and being “predisposed to judge them” (Participant 3, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

The participants were asked to identify strengths within the undocumented Latino immigrant population, and 70% of the participants identified family

relationships and familial support as a strength. As one participant noted, “There’s always somebody coming forward saying they’re willing to take the kids” (Participant 9, personal communication, April 10, 2017). A different participant indicated that even when the family members “do not like each other” they help each other (Participant 3, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

Another 30% of the participants reported hardworking values within this population as a strength. One participant stated, “They’re law-abiding, hardworking people that just want to get by and provide for their families” (Participant, 4, personal communication, March 3, 2017). A different participant reported, “I think their focus is more like surviving and providing” (Participant 7, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

An additional strength that was identified by 20% of the participants was this population's cooperativeness. One participant described this population as “willing to work with the department” and “easier to follow direction,” due to their fear of being deported (Participant 5, personal communication, April 10, 2017). Another participant stated, “They tend to cooperate with the Department and cooperate with you when you lend them a helping hand and are just understanding and not judgmental” (Participant 8, personal communication, April 10, 2017).

Further, the participants were asked what worked well when working with this population and 50% of the participants reported that being able to speak the Spanish language and possessing a good understanding of this population’s

culture was important. 10% noted it was important to be able to connect with the clients by providing services geared toward their needs such as referring victims of domestic violence to legal services that could assist them with adjusting their undocumented immigrant statuses.

The study participants were asked to identify any challenges or barriers when working with this population in terms of family reunification or service delivery. On this question, 40% noted assimilation issues including learning about the US culture, understanding the laws and not speaking the English language as the bigger barriers. One participant reported, “Trying to blend those two (cultures) and the parents understanding how it works here, that’s the biggest challenge: educating them” (Participant 2, personal communication, March 3, 2017). Another 40% of the participants reported it could take longer for a client to reunify with his/her children if they had been deported because they may not have the same access to services in their country of origin. Another 40% of the participants indicated limited access to services as a barrier to reunification; two participants noted having limited Spanish speaking therapists in this region as a reoccurring issue. 30% of the participants indicated fear of being deported and not cooperating with law enforcement or the child welfare agency as another barrier. One participant noted, “Their issues regarding their legal status, they’re afraid that any unwanted attention from any government agency like CPS or law enforcement is going to influence their ability to stay here” (Participant 4, personal communication, March 3, 2017). Another 10% of

participants reported having social workers who are not aware of the services provided to undocumented Latino immigrant clients as a barrier. Another 10% of the participants indicated a lack of representation within the judicial system as a barrier. One participant suggested these clients “can’t even communicate or express their concerns” and are not able to have “someone that represents [them] and is able to advocate for them” (Participant 8, personal communication, April 10, 2017). Another 10% of the participants reported not having clear direction as to whether children can be placed with undocumented relatives as a barrier because it appears that this determination is left up to the assigned social worker.

Participants were also asked how they felt about reunifying children with parents who had been deported to another country. All participants indicated they favored reunifying children with their parents, regardless if they had been deported to another country. Although all of the participants were in favor of reunifying children with their parents in another country, 50% reported they would need to obtain an assessment of that parent’s circumstances prior to sending the children to that country. Further, 20% of the participants indicated that if the parent is a non-offending parent who lives in another country and the children are removed from an offending parent in the United States, the children should immediately be released to the non-offending parent in their country of residence. 20% of the participants reported the process of reunifying children

with parents in Mexico often takes long, even more than the 18 months that the parents legally have to reunify.

The study participants were also asked if they felt there was a discrepancy or lack of information available regarding working cases with undocumented Latino immigrant clients. 30% of the participants reported having the necessary information because they had worked with this population. 40% reported not having sufficient knowledge but identified co-workers that they had asked for assistance when they worked with this population. 10% reported having knowledge about this topic because of training provided by the child welfare agency; however, they indicated not having experience as they had not been assigned any cases involving this population. 20% reported they had no knowledge as to this population. A participant stated, "The lack of information is actually another big challenge especially for the social workers working the case, and we do need more information, and more training of social workers with the population" (Participant 5, personal communication, April 10, 2017).

The participants were asked to provide ideas about how to improve and provide information to all social workers regarding working with undocumented immigrant Latino clients. Approximately 10% of participants proposed having a specialized unit that can work with this population; the participant related, "If we could have a unit that specializes in those topics with undocumented immigrants because a lot of times we don't have the sensitivity or knowledge about culture, about their struggles." (Participant 1, personal communication, March 3,

2017). Another 10% of participants suggested having an immigration lawyer that can assist the Department in managing these cases. 20% of the study participants suggested utilizing the International Liaison Unit more, 40% reported they would like to obtain trainings or workshops including visuals such as flyers, diagrams or flowcharts, to obtain more knowledge. 10% of the participants recommended having more service providers prepared to work with these clients as beneficial. Another 10% of the participants suggested having more community partners from this population to work with the agency and clients. According to the participant, "If we had more community partners from the Hispanic people themselves, that would help the Department foster this communication and reunification" (Participant 5, personal communication, April 10, 2017).

Data Interpretation

This study identified issues related to acculturation such as learning about the US culture, understanding the laws, including child abuse and neglect rules, and not knowing the language as barriers and challenges that the undocumented Latino immigrants involved in child welfare cases face. These findings are consistent with literature that found a lack of awareness by caseworkers as to immigrant families, such as the likelihood that they are not acculturated and therefore, lack an understanding as to the laws about CWS can be a significant barrier for accurate assessments (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2010).

This study also identified fear of being deported and not cooperating with law enforcement as another barrier when working with the undocumented Latino immigrant population. This finding was in line with a study by Kirz et. al, (2012) which found that child protection workers perceived fear among immigrants and engaged in strategies with those clients in response to that fear (Kriz, Slayter, Iannicelli, & Lourie, 2012).

Additionally, this study identified limited access to culturally appropriate services as significant barriers to family reunification in the Latino undocumented immigrant population. This finding was consistent with a study by Ayon (2009), who found that a worker's knowledge of systems of care and the Department's resources and their willingness to help families played a role in the process of accessing services (Ayon, 2009). Study participants reported having limited Spanish speaking service providers could potentially delay the reunification process if the client had not made sufficient progress in their case plan.

This study also found that several of the study participants had limited information regarding policies and processes of providing services and working with undocumented Latino immigrant clients. This finding was consistent with Osterling and Han, 2011, who noted that child welfare professionals who work with Mexican immigrant families have "limited information on the effectiveness of their current practices on how to best direct child welfare resources" (Osterling & Han, 2011). Nonetheless, participants in this study who reported having limited information also had limited experiences working with this population. However,

they were able to identify co-workers who they could turn to if working with these clients. Additionally, they identified the International Liaison Unit (ILU) as a recognized resource when working with this population.

Finally, this study found that all the participants were for reunifying children with parents that had been deported to another country. However, 50% of these participants indicated they would want an assessment of the parent's circumstances in their country of residence to ensure it was in the children's best interest to be placed back in their care. The study found that the participants who had experience with this process reported it was often a lengthy method that could go over the 18-month timeframe permitted by law to provide for parents to reunify with their children. These conclusions corroborated the findings that prompted legislation such as the "Reuniting Immigrant Families Act," which authorized child welfare agencies to provide additional time to find and reunite detained and deported parents with their children or find placement with relatives, regardless of their immigration status (Thronson, 2013).

Implications of Findings for Micro and/or Macro Practice

The findings identified in this study were consistent with the findings obtained through the literature review as well as with researchers' experiences. It supported that undocumented Latino immigrant clients frequently face increased barriers and challenges that can impact the outcome of their involvement with child welfare agencies.

These challenges and barriers included: lack of assimilation to the laws and child abuse proceedings, fear of deportation and therefore, hesitance to cooperate with government agencies, limited access to culturally appropriate services, delays in reunification due to unavailable services and also due to immigration proceedings, such as deportation to their country of origin.

Due to the large percentage of Latino immigrant clients serviced by the identified child welfare agency, it was deemed essential for the staff to be knowledgeable as to this population and its culture. As a recommendation, the researchers determined it would be important for the agency to expand on their training to promote further cultural awareness as to this population, including the identified barriers, and also their strengths. These training would better serve the child welfare staff if focused on cultural humility, to aid workers in completing fair and informed assessments when working with undocumented Latino immigrant families. The improved knowledge of child welfare workers, could bolster engagement and improve the tailoring of service case plans for families.

Additionally, policy should continue to be evaluated to ensure that the growing needs of these families are appropriately addressed by laws, timelines, and adopted procedures. For instance, the insurance the agency is in compliance with laws such as the "Reuniting Immigrant Families Act," which seeks to ensure that reasonable services are provided to undocumented immigrant clients by considering the barriers and challenges faced by this community. Also, increasing educational tools to bring awareness to workers

regarding the specific services and assistance already offered to this population by the county. For instance, the ability to arrange border visits between parents and children, SIJS, out of country reunification, and extended visits in the parent's country of origin. Adequately preparing staff with knowledge and education as to this population can improve outcomes by encouraging timely and tailored service delivery.

Other practices that should be implemented is the increased availability of service providers that can meet address the needs of this population, particularly in the Spanish language and with culturally appropriate relevance. As noted in the findings, there is a shortage of service providers for this population, which as emphasized in the literature can hinder family reunification. Also, it would be important to engage community partners from within this population, to better aid and connect families with the community.

Summary

This chapter contains the data analysis process for this study. A description of the ten study participants including their demographic information is presented. The study participants are child welfare workers employed by a child welfare agency in Southern California. The study participants included individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds, age, gender and experience working in child welfare. The responses to the research questions were organized into categories based on their relevance. The findings of the data analysis were

subsequently provided. These findings are consistent with studies that have been completed respecting this same topic.

CHAPTER FIVE

TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

Introduction

This final chapter discusses the process of termination for this study. The researchers examine the relationships with the study participants that will be maintained once the study is completed. The chapter discusses the dissemination of the findings to the study participants as well as to the study site.

Termination of Study

The focus of this research was to determine the effects of undocumented Latino immigration status of family reunification and service delivery in child welfare. The hermeneutic dialectic circle included ten child welfare workers and the two researchers. In a constructivist study, termination of the research includes providing the study participants a report of the findings and allowing the participants to continue to develop their own construction (Morris, 2006). Since the researchers are currently employed at the study site, they will continue to have a relationship with the study participants. The hope is that the study participants will continue to build upon the joint construction of the findings.

Communicating Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

The researchers will provide the final report to the research study site. The researchers hope that the findings help the study site evaluate the current practice when working with undocumented Latino immigrant clients and

make any necessary changes if needed. Moreover, the researchers will communicate the findings of this report to the study participants through personal communication.

Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

The researchers are currently employed in the child welfare agency where this study took place therefore they will continue to have a working relationship with the study participants.

Dissemination Plan

The findings of this study were communicated to CSUSB Social Work department through the completion of the final research report. The results of the study will be disseminated on CSUSB's ScholarWorks website. Additionally, the final report will be provided to the study site.

Summary

This final chapter addressed the termination of this study. The researchers will continue to maintain a relationship with the study participants as well as the study site, as they are currently employed at this agency. The study participants will be informed of the final findings. The study site and CSUSB School of Social work will be provided with a final research report that will be available through CSUSB ScholarWorks website.

APPENDIX A
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

STUDY QUESTIONS

Engagement

- How long have you worked for this agency?
- What do you like most about working within child welfare?
- What ethnic group do you identify with?
- Age group?

Follow up

- What is your experience with working with Latino immigrant clients?
- Do you feel confident in working with this population?
- Do you have any reservations as to working with this population?
- Are there any strengths that you can identify within the Latino immigrant population?
- How do you feel about reunifying children to parents who have been deported?
- Do you know the process of providing services to undocumented immigrant clients?
- What do you think is this population's greater challenges when it comes to reunifying with their children?
- What do you think would benefit you towards becoming more knowledgeable as to this population?
- Would you want to receive additional information training as to working with this population?

- What is your understanding of the agency's policies and procedures to providing reunification services to immigrant/deported parents?

Termination

- Do you have any questions or concerns regarding the issues that we discussed?
- Do you know of someone else who may be interested in talking to us about this topic?

** Study Questions created by researchers Mayra E. Camargo and Rocio Silva.

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the effects of immigration status on family reunification in a child welfare agency in Southern California. The study is being conducted by graduate students Mayra E. Camargo and Rocio Silva under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chang, Professor at the School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine the effects of immigration on family reunification in child welfare.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be interviewed and asked about their experience and knowledge of working with Latino immigrant clients, their perception of the needs for this population and the availability of services for this population.

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

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

DURATION: It will take 15 to 20 minutes to complete the interview.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to either Dr. Janet Chang at (909) 537-5184 or Mayra E. Camargo at 909-730-2419 or Rocio Silva (909) 489-9457.

RESULTS: Please contact the Pfau Library Scholarworks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu>) or the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services, Children's Services Division for the results of the study after September 2017.

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

Please place an X mark here

Date

909.537.5501 . 909.537.7029

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

The (California State University . Sakersfield Chancellislands Chico Dominguez Hills East Bay . Fresno Fullerton Humboldt Long Beach Los Angeles Maritime Academy Monterey S.y Northridge Pomona Sacramento San Bernardino San Diego San Francisco San Jose San Luis Obispo San Marcos Sonoma Stanislaus

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Debriefing Statement

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate the effects of undocumented Latino immigration status on family reunification in a child welfare agency in Southern California. We are interested in obtaining information as to the current social work practices utilized with immigrant clients in this agency, as well as understanding the needs for this population and the social worker's perception of working with this population. This is to inform you that no deception is involved in this study.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Mayra E. Camargo at 909-730-2419 or Rocio Silva at (909) 489-9457. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Mayra Camargo (email: camam323@coyote.csusb.edu) or Rocio Silva (silvr308@coyote.csusb.edu), after September 2017.

APPENDIX D
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee

Researcher(s) Mayra Camargo & Rocio Silva
Proposal Title The Effects of Immigration Status
on Family Reunification
SW 1650

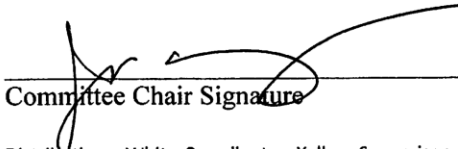
Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.

Proposal is:

- ☒ approved
☐ to be resubmitted with revisions listed below
☐ to be forwarded to the campus IRB for review

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

- ☐ faculty signature missing
☐ missing informed consent ☐ debriefing statement
☐ revisions needed in informed consent ☐ debriefing
☐ data collection instruments missing
☐ agency approval letter missing
☐ CITI missing
☐ revisions in design needed (specified below)
- _____


Committee Chair Signature

2/24/2017
Date

Distribution: White-Coordinator; Yellow-Supervisor; Pink-Student

APPENDIX E:
STUDY SITE APPROVAL LETTER



Administrative Office
4060 County Circle Drive, Riverside, CA 92503
951.358.3000 FAX: 951.358.3036
www.dpss.co.riverside.ca.us

Susan von Zabern, Director
Dr. Marie Brown-Mercadel, Assistant Director

February 16, 2017

Institutional Review Board
School of Social Work
CSUSB

Mayra Camargo and Rocio Silva have requested permission to complete a Master's Research Project with our agency in order to fulfill the requirements of a Master of Social Work degree at CSU San Bernardino. This study will examine statistics regarding family reunification with undocumented immigrants.

Students will use data they collect from our agency, the UC Berkeley Child Welfare Indicators Project website, and social worker interviews to conduct this research. They expect this project to be completed by June of 2017.

I understand that students are required to publish the results of this research project online at the CSUSB Pfau Library. I understand that any reports generated by this research will not reveal participants' or case specific identities. I may request that any published, written, or oral presentations generated by this research preserve the anonymity of the program, agency, and county. If you require further information, please contact me at 951-358-3939.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marie Brown-Mercadel".

Dr. Marie Brown-Mercadel
Assistant Director, Children's Services Division
Riverside County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS)
4060 County Circle Dr.
Riverside, CA 92503
951-358-3939

Dedicated to Supporting and Improving the Health, Safety and Well-being of Individuals and Families

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review

ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. For each phase both authors responsibilities were assigned as listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Mayra E. Camargo and Rocio Silva

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Mayra E. Camargo and Rocio Silva

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

- a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Mayra E. Camargo and Rocio Silva

- b. Methods

Team Effort: Mayra E. Camargo and Rocio Silva

- c. Results

Team Effort: Mayra E. Camargo and Rocio Silva

- d. Discussion

Team Effort: Mayra E. Camargo and Rocio Silva